

Cruising . . . TO WHERE?

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WHAT IS THE PORT OF DOVER'S CAPACITY for cruise ship calls? It's a question we're often asked when we receive visitors to the new cruise terminal, particularly from local organisations involved in tourism and commerce who are enjoying the influx of visitors to the town – and hoping to see many more of them in the years to come!

There is no easy answer. Cruise ships come and go like London buses. Some days they come in twos, three or even, as on one September Sunday, four were dotted around the port. But then the cruise terminal can be idle for days waiting for its next call.

This year Dover will receive about 100 cruise calls, the majority crammed into the months of May, June, July and August. Next year the number is set to rise to about 120.

Cruising in Northern Europe is mainly a summer activity. The big liners such as *Royal Princess*, *Maasdam*, *Norwegian Crown* and *Royal Viking* have re-positioned to warmer climes for our winter, mostly cruising from the American east coast to the Caribbean. But the good news is that the cruise operators were so impressed with the warm welcome and quality of service in Dover that they've booked to come back next summer.

Getting the cruise companies to come to Dover in the first place was no easy task. I well remember the cynical reaction when the Harbour Board announced in 1991 it was actively going to try to attract the business. Keeping it, and expanding it, is now the challenge facing us all.

Recently we received a visit to the terminal from the Dover Cruise Welcome Group, a gathering of local organisations – including the Dover Society – business folk and individuals commissioned to making a success of this new-found boom to the local economy. They had nothing particular to gain from the visit, but what impressed me was their belief that this could be the start of something big for the area and they wanted to be part of it. It's that kind of commitment and enthusiasm we want to encourage and foster, for it is this attitude which can complement the Board's efforts to develop the business.

All of this brings us conveniently back to the capacity issue. In an ideal world (ha!) one call every day would be perfect. The cruise terminal can accommodate the largest cruise liners currently sailing in European waters. But we must not lose sight of the fact that when there are two or more calls on the same day we, as a port, cannot offer the same prestigious level of facilities at our back-up berths at the Eastern Docks.

The Harbour Board therefore finds itself in something of a predicament. At the current level of cruise business, our £10 million investment in the terminal will not be paid off for at least ten years. There is no

doubt cruising in Northern Europe is growing – but is it growing sufficiently to repay investment in a second cruise terminal? Our Board will have to be convinced it is if we decide to progress further.

When it comes to expanding any kind of facility at the port there is always the problem of where we can put it. It's a pity our forefathers did not make provision for

a further 100 metres on the straight section of the Admiralty Pier. That would have given us the ability to berth two large liners on the cruise terminal.

So now our planners are looking elsewhere in the port to research and cost locations for a second dedicated terminal – the financial justification will then have to be demonstrated.

STOP PRESS

SAGA BUYS OWN CRUISE SHIP

SAGA HOLIDAYS LTD. has bought a cruise ship from Cunard. Formerly *The Sagafford*, the ship has been re-named *The Saga Rose*.

Saga's brochure introducing The Saga Rose gives details of its eleven cruises from May to December 1997. Those in the off-season (May, September, December) go to the Mediterranean, while the summer season itineraries, from June to August, include Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland,

Russia and Estonia. There are two cruises in July which go to Iceland.

The Saga Rose carries 580 passengers and 350 crew. Over 90% of the cabins are outside.

And the good news is: ALL CRUISES START FROM DOVER.

