

Maine's Portland talks up new cruise site, trolley tour, infrastructure



Leeman - former maritime operations manager now handles cruise marketing

Portland, Maine is readying a cruise-dedicated website and will initiate a trolley service offering a hop-on, hop-off tour—among the developments that its new cruise marketing manager will present to South Florida lines during visits next week.

Bob Leeman, who previously oversaw maritime operations and city properties, is now Portland's cruise marketing manager and will call on lines in Miami and Fort Lauderdale to discuss the 2014 season and beyond.

'I'm focused on getting more cruise ships to visit and working with [tour operator] Intercruises to make sure customer satisfaction on shore excursions is high. On most, it is, but we can always make improvements,' Leeman said.

The trolley service will provide narration supplied by Intercruises. Passengers can buy a ticket aboard their ship or in the terminal and hop on and off along the route, to be served by five trolleys.

The new website, cruiseportlandmaine.com, is expected to go live in November, highlighting excursions and visitor attractions in downtown Portland, Freeport and Kennebunkport. It also will link to cruise lines serving Portland and provide data about port facilities. Plus, the site will enable local stakeholders to keep up to date on cruise operations.

The crew shuttle service, championed by former cruise marketing manager Sandy Needham-Blackwood, has been 'an amazing hit,' Leeman said. It will continue next season.

Over the past year Portland added three bollards to Ocean Gateway Terminal's new Pier 2, Berth 2. The one 200-ton and two 150-ton bollards

make it possible to handle large ships, up to 1,200 feet. This fall, the pier will also be installing a new eight-inch water line with more than 100 pounds of pressure.

The largest cruise ship currently visiting is Royal Caribbean International's Explorer of the Seas.

Portland had 59 cruise calls in 2013, including 31 large ship and 28 small ship visits. Leeman said 36 large ship calls are booked for next year and the city is pleased to welcome back Holland America Line among them. The small ship schedule is not yet finalized. If American Cruise Lines continues its homeport operations, 28 small ship visits would be anticipated.

Also in 2014, Portland will resume ferry service to Yarmouth, Nova Scotia. It has been three years since The Cat, a high-speed ferry, linked the destinations. The new service, aboard a 530-foot car ferry that is under construction, will take 10 hours, with departures from Portland at 8 p.m. Daily seasonal service is to begin in May.

With the ferry returning to Portland in the evening, it is hoped that tourists will spend a night in the city and sample its renowned restaurant scene.

Leeman said Portland is addressing US Customs and Border Protection concerns that there be no cross-contamination of passengers at Ocean Gateway Terminal, which also serves cruise ships, and he will talk with Florida lines next week about any concerns they have related to ferry operations.

Portland is in the process of filling Leeman's former maritime operations position, splitting the roles of waterfront manager and public properties manager. An interim maritime manager is in place with the permanent position expected to be filled by December.

Next week in Florida Leeman expects to visit planners at Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, Carnival Cruise Lines, Princess, Regent Seven Seas, Oceania Cruises and The World.

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