



PRESS RELEASE

Dorset ports to host international cruise shipping forum

The Dorset ports of Portland and Poole are to host the third Seatrade Cruise Forum in April this year. Formerly called the House Party, when the event was held in Leeds Castle in 2002 and Liverpool in 2005, the Forum brings together the top executives of the leading international cruise shipping companies to meet, over two days, representatives from the UK, Irish and French Channel ports, local authorities, tourism and economic development organisations, and visitor attractions. The ship owners explain what they want for their vessels and their passengers and how they see the market developing, whilst the delegates have the opportunity directly to engage decision makers with information on what they have to offer.

Delegates of the Port and Tourism industry come from all over the UK, Ireland and French Channel ports and, following the South East and the North West, 2007 is the year for the South West of England to stage the cruise showcase. Seatrade notes that places are limited at this exclusive event and are subject to eligibility. The programme on 25th and 26th April, is being co-ordinated by Destination South West (DSW), the regional cruise marketing group. Other hosts are the two ports themselves, Dorset County Council, the Borough of Poole and the South West of England Regional Development Agency. The Forum has the backing of Visit Britain, Cruise UK and South West Tourism. DSW is forging links with the Channel Cruise Group, whose members comprise ports from both sides of the English Channel and it is expected that representatives from this group will be present at the Forum, as ports from all three countries seek to maximise the range and variety of attractions through co-operation on a European scale.

The conference activities will be centred on the RNLI headquarters at Poole, with a welcoming Reception on the first evening at the Weymouth & Portland National Sailing Academy and a Gala Dinner the following night at Minterne House, the historic Dorset home of the Digby family. Regionally sourced produce, including wines and cider, will be promoted at these events. The programme includes tours by boat of both Portland and Poole harbours, providing the opportunity for American and European visitors to enjoy the exceptional beauties of the Jurassic Coast and to view the facilities available for cruise ships at the two ports.

In announcing the news, Chris Hayman, managing director of Seatrade said, "We are delighted to be working with the South West on this unique event. We believe the UK, along with Ireland and the French Channel, have great potential as a major destination for cruise tourism."

Bob Harrison, Director of Cruise Operations at Destination South West, said, “This is the most prestigious event of its kind in the UK calendar and 2007 is a marvellous opportunity, not just for Portland and Poole but for all DSW member ports, to build on the growth already achieved over the past three years and promote the South West as a major destination to the decision makers in the international cruise business. Within easy travelling distances of our ports, we have world class attractions like Bath, Stonehenge and the Eden Project, to say nothing of the many centres of excellence in the region and the natural beauty of the coast and countryside that make the South West such a magnet for British and overseas tourists.”

Jim Stewart, Chief Executive of Poole Harbour Commissioners, pointed out that recent dredging had greatly extended the size of cruise ships that could now visit the largest natural harbour in Europe, while the port itself was well situated to give passengers the option of exploring east into Hampshire and towards London or heading north and west into Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire and along the Dorset and East Devon Coast World Heritage Site.

John Healy, Portland Port’s General Manager for Business Development, highlighted Portland’s deep water and easy access that enabled it to handle the biggest of cruise ships, while its well protected harbour had already demonstrated its availability when other ports were closed by weather. The London Olympics were another boost, both because the prospect of the sailing events at Portland was already exciting interest amongst cruise ship operators and because road and rail infrastructure improvements would enhance the Port’s role as a turnaround port for passengers travelling through London’s airports. Portland had already built an extension to its Britannia Passenger Terminal and this month will be submitting plans for a major berth development, part of which would provide additional cruise facilities in time for 2012.

Ends

16th January 2007