

MORE SHIPS, MORE PORTS ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

The ports of Gaspé, Percé, Sept-Îles, Baie-Comeau and Havre-Saint-Pierre are busy as beavers gearing up for cruise passengers with the announcement that three international lines will call in 2009 and 2010.

Kicking off the 2009 season, Holland America's Maasdam arrives in May. The 15-day cruise from Fort Lauderdale to Montreal has stops in Quebec City, Gaspé and Sept-Îles. In October, it departs on a similar 13-day cruise with Baie-Comeau replacing Sept-Îles. Holland America, which has strict criteria for new destinations, is the first international cruise line to visit Sept-Îles.

"Gaspé, Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles are fantastic new ports that feature outstanding attractions," said Richard Meadows, Holland America's executive vice-president of

marketing, sales and guest programs. "Our goal is to introduce guests to a wide range of new outdoor activities and cultural experiences on these cruises, whether on a fall foliage cruise or enjoying a summer family vacation."

At Sept-Îles, excursion passengers will travel by train along the Moisie River to a native Innu community where re-enactments of tribal customs and a salmon bake will take place.

In Gaspé, the main attraction is Bonaventure Island, home to North America's largest colony of gannets.

By KATHLYN HORIBE

Îles de la Madeleine

Another destination on the St. Lawrence is Îles de la Madeleine, a unique archipelago sheltered by the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

Shaped like a half moon, the red-cliffed island chain possesses a unique Madelinot culture and a history of profound isolation. Here summer continues right into September due to the mild maritime climate.

In July, Holland America's Maasdam will dock with over 1,600 passengers, while Silverseas' expedition ship, Prince Albert II, arrives in September with 132 guests.

Nature and culture take centre stage year-round. Home to over 100 species of birds, the archipelago was aptly named "islands brushed by the waves" by the Micmac Indians. Ever present breezes sweep over the beaches, the long thin sand dunes and the wide open spaces.

Visitors can participate in many outdoor activities. The many lagoons and protected waters ensure the islands are a safe playground for water sports. Kayak

or paddle through the caves and tunnels carved by the relentless sea or snorkel among the harbour seals by Corps Mort Island. Hike the picturesque trails or stroll along the panoramic roadways.

Due to the constant winds, surfers come from around the world to compete in the Island Cup Windsurf competition. Kite flying, swimming and scuba diving are other popular activities. There's also hiking and biking along the off-road paths or bird watching at the Île-Brion Island Ecological Reserve or the National Wildlife Reserve of East Point, which protects endangered birds like the piping plover.

Take the time to strike up a conversation with the islanders. You'll be charmed by their genuine warmth and hospitality.



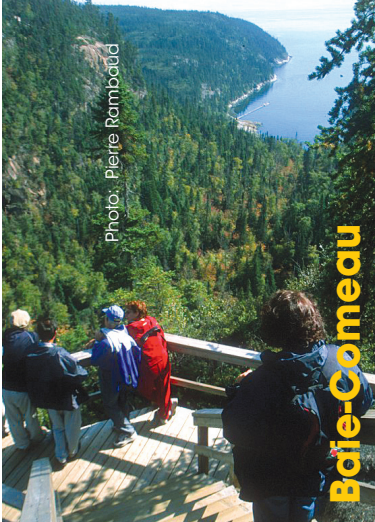


Photo: Pierre Rambaud

Baie-Comeau



Havre-Saint-Pierre



Photo: Philippe Delisle

Percé



Photo: Sept-Îles Port Authority

Sept-Îles

In Baie-Comeau, passengers can visit the Garden of the Glaciers, an interpretation, exploration and research attraction about the Ice Age and climate change, or participate in a variety of outdoor activities. Also calling at the port this year is the Balmoral of U.K.-based Fred Olsen Cruise Lines.

Another welcome two-time caller to Gaspé and Percé in 2009 is Travel Dynamics' Clelia II, a yacht-like vessel that accommodates 100 passengers.

Next year will be another exciting year for St. Lawrence ports. After years of negotiations between Carnival Cruise Lines and Quebec cruise organizations such as the St. Lawrence Cruise Association, the world's biggest cruise ship line will visit Baie-Comeau, Havre-Saint-Pierre and Quebec City for the first time ever.

"Carnival is always seeking exciting new itinerary choices," said president and CEO Gerry Cahill. "These new nine-day sailings provide guests of all ages an opportunity to experience and explore the natural wonders of Quebec, one of North America's most historic and fascinating cruising regions. And when combined with a departure from New York – a convenient home port and an exciting destination unto itself – these voyages are even more attractive."

Carnival has designed a special itinerary – without stops in either Maine or Atlantic Canada – called Quebec: After the Glaciers to feature these three ports of call. The program had been scheduled to launch this year but was pushed back to 2010 because of the current unstable economic situation.

"It's in everyone's interests to ensure the arrival of Carnival in 2010 is a resounding success rather than it being only moderately so in these tough economic times of 2009," said Ross Gaudreault, president and CEO of the Quebec Port Authority.

"Because this is a new program requiring ample

lead time to effectively market and promote in the current economic environment, we're postponing the program until 2010," said Terry Thornton, Carnival's senior vice-president of marketing planning. "We anticipate that this move will ensure strong consumer demand for these itineraries and, in fact, have opted to utilize a larger ship, the Carnival Glory, when we do commence the program in 2010."

The general manager of the City of Baie-Comeau and vice-president of Croisières Baie-Comeau, Paul Joncas, sees Carnival's decision as a vote of confidence in Baie-Comeau. "The fact that they have confirmed their arrival in 2010 with an even bigger ship is a clear signal," he said. "Nonetheless, we were ready to welcome visitors starting this summer with the official opening of the Garden of the Glaciers slated for June 2009, and our newly completed port infrastructures." Baie-Comeau still expects to welcome some 4,000 cruise passengers in the coming season.

In Havre-Saint-Pierre, port authorities and development organizations are confident in the potential of their tourist attractions, such as Mingan Archipelago National Park Reserve, and are continuing their efforts to develop their offerings and ensure cruise passengers arriving this season take away lasting memories of their stopover.

Government investment

To handle the increase in larger cruise ships on the St. Lawrence, the Canadian and Quebec governments will invest approximately \$100 million over the next five years to upgrade port facilities and enhance tourist attractions in Baie-Comeau, Gaspé, Havre-Saint-Pierre, Saguenay, Sept-Îles and Îles de la Madeleine. The municipal governments of these ports will also contribute funding.

It will be money well spent according to a study compiled by Business Research and Economic Advisors.

MORE PORTS

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Since 2003, the Canadian cruise industry had grown by almost 28 per cent nationally in four years. The research was conducted for the NorthWest CruiseShip Association and its Canadian cruise port partners.

The study shows that Quebec recorded the biggest growth in cruise line spending, up to \$51 million from \$49.5 million. By 2014, Quebec could welcome approximately 400,000 passengers from 300 calls, an average annual growth rate of 17 per cent, with overall tourist spending reaching \$1.4 billion.

According to René Trépanier, executive director of the St. Lawrence Cruise Association, the study confirms to the government partners that it is worthwhile to invest in the development of ports of call along the St. Lawrence River. And the investments are already paying dividends. This year, the SLCA expects approximately 203,300 cruise passengers, a whopping 39.1-per-cent growth from last year's 123,683, with most of the nine ports of call registering increases.

In 2008, major projects to benefit the cruise industry included the modernization of Quebec City's Jean-Lesage International Airport and the inauguration of a 370-metre (1,214-foot) dedicated cruise pier in Saguenay that can accommodate ships as large as the Queen Mary 2. For embarking and disembarking passengers at the port, a covered walkway was constructed. It is suspended on a floating steel platform. Once the cruise terminal is completed in September, the cost, including the pier, will total \$34 million, said Richard Thibault, business development and major project manager for

the Port of Saguenay. It was a proud moment for Saguenay last September when Holland America's Eurodam tied up to the new pier.

In Baie-Comeau, the upgrade to the wharf will cost \$10 million. In addition, Croisières Baie-Comeau will conduct a study to identify port facility needs and tourism packages for cruise companies.

In the Gaspésie, l'escale Gaspésie, comprising the ports of Gaspé, Percé and Chandler, was formed to position these cities as ports of call for international cruise lines, said Stéphane Sainte-Croix, executive director of the Gaspé tourism and convention bureau.

Projects for the region include a train connecting the three destinations, construction or upgrade of various reception areas for passengers and extension of Gaspé's Sandy Beach dock. In Percé, a rail station by the beach will be constructed this year, said Marie Leblanc, who is responsible for tourism for the City of Percé.

At the end of January, the Port of Sept-Îles, in the presence of its major partners, the City of Sept-Îles, the Innu TakuaiKAN Uashat mak Mani-Utenam Band Council, and Destination Sept-Îles Nakauinanu, announced the awarding of a \$356,000 contract to Axor Experts-Conseils for detail engineering and the preparation of tender specifications for a cruise ship dock.

Following preliminary studies that began last May, this latest step will result in the production of final plans for the dock, including cost estimates. It will allow the port to launch a call for bids for the construction of the dock, which could begin this summer.



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CANADIAN SAILINGS

With the preliminary engineering phase complete, the Port of Sept-Îles also unveiled the final conceptual plans for the cruise ship dock. It will be located at the Monseigneur Blanche wharf and will be able to accommodate ships up to 315 metres (1,033 feet) long and with a 2,500-passenger capacity. "With an 18-month schedule, this project of almost \$20 million is one of the largest infrastructure investments to take place at the port since work on the Relance wharf in 1986," said Pierre Gagnon, president and CEO of the Sept-Îles Port Authority.

To accommodate cruise ships of 2,500 or more passengers, dredging in Havre-Saint-Pierre will increase the water depth to 9.5 metres (31 feet), said Charlotte Cormier, cruise ship development agent for the Port of Havre-Saint-Pierre development and management corporation. In addition, funding was granted to market and promote Havre-Saint-Pierre as a cruise port and organize tourism activities.

As for Îles de la Madeleine, it received \$14 million in federal funding for a breakwater restoration project at its Cap-aux-Meules port, which should be completed by 2010. Dredging will also continue to increase water depth.

Trois-Rivières' niche market is the smaller cruise lines. Following an agreement with the city, the Trois-Rivières Port Authority will provide public access to the area between its administrative building and the harbourfront park as well as relinquish two other sections. With the cohabitation of commercial activity and urban life, the space devoted to recreational activities for citizens and tourists has increased 15 per cent to over

55,000 square metres (592,000 square feet), said Jacques Paquin, the port's vice-president of marketing and business development. Other plans include modernizing and developing facilities and equipment to the tune of \$146 million. Financing will be divided among the Trois-Rivières Port Authority (\$55 million), its partners (\$41 million) and the federal government (\$50 million).

As part of its Vision 2020 strategic development plan, the Montreal Port Authority has proposed the transformation of Alexandra Pier, which welcomes cruise ships in Montreal, into a recreational, tourism, artistic and cultural hub. About \$150 million would need to be invested in that project.

Last September, Montreal welcomed for the first time the Royal Princess cruise ship, operated by Princess Cruises. The vessel arrived from Stockholm. At a ceremony to mark the occasion, Patrice Pelletier, president and CEO of the Montreal Port Authority, said, "Your route to Montreal shows just how important a tourist and cultural attraction our metropolis is for cruise lines on the St. Lawrence and the U.S. East Coast."

In 2008, a total of 33,314 cruise passengers arrived in Montreal, up 13.9 per cent over the previous year.

Quebec City, which held year-long celebrations to mark the 400th anniversary of its founding, had another banner year with 84 cruise ship calls and more than 112,000 passengers and crew members, up more than 24 per cent over 2007. Of these passengers, more than 17,700 from the Eurodam and the Sea Princess chose Quebec City as an embarkation/debarkation site.

Holland America's Maasdam made 16 scheduled stopovers in the provincial capital and 20 other calls were made by the line, the port's largest international cruise ship customer.

Three ships were welcomed in one day in September and four vessels, including the Royal Princess and the Eurodam, made inaugural visits to the city in 2008. When the latter arrived on Sept. 10 for the first of two calls, a marching band and costumed actors were dockside to greet it. In addition, due to its retirement from service, the Queen Elizabeth 2 was welcomed for the last time.

Despite the absence of Carnival Cruise Lines in 2009, Quebec is anticipating a busy cruise season, with eight major turnaround operations scheduled, including the Crown Princess, as well as inaugural visits by European cruise line Costa Cruises and the newest Cunard ship, the Queen Victoria, on Oct. 4-5.

