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Fincantieri's Maurizio Cergol
Designing platforms for growth



Saguenay's pier will be developed as part of a 5-year project to support cruise growth

Northern exposure

A round up of latest developments at ports and destinations along the East Coast of Canada and the US. By Anne Kalosh.

Anchored by cosmopolitan Montréal and Québec City, the Saint Lawrence region is dotted with new opportunities. More than half a dozen emerging ports provide attractions ranging from a brand new Glacier Interpretation Center to a scenic railway journey, a spectacular fjord to an indigenous Innu cultural experience.

These places are gaining exposure as Cruise the Saint Lawrence hosts the Canada/New England Cruise Symposium, June 16-18 in Saguenay. Many ships have sailed through Saguenay Fjord but now vessels can come alongside at a freshly completed pier.

Suddenly the Saint Lawrence seems to be in the charts for a vast range of ships.

The benefits expected from the symposium are 'tremendous,' according to Rene Trépanier, executive director of Cruise the Saint Lawrence. Drawing media and cruise executives will pay dividends, especially if they take part in a tour of emerging destinations.

'We will see the future of cruise in the Saint Lawrence: five new ports, all working hard to be ready for 2009. They all will host ships practically for the first time,' Trépanier says.

Suddenly the Saint Lawrence seems to be in the charts for a vast range of ships. In 2009, they stretch from Caledonia and Princess Danae to Silver Cloud and AIDAaura, Costa Atlantica to Queen Victoria.

2010 will see the arrival of MSC Cruises. And Carnival Cruise Lines will deploy Carnival Glory on a trio of nine-day summer sailings marketed as 'Québec – After the Glaciers.'

'This new itinerary will offer a great

variety of shore experiences including the new ports of Baie-Comeau and Havre-Saint-Pierre,' says Terry Thornton, svp marketing planning for Carnival. 'In addition, the extended call in spectacular Québec City will provide time to explore all of the exciting sights and attractions.'

'This combination of different port experiences and the chance to cruise the Saint Lawrence region makes these cruises unique,' Thornton adds. 'We know our guests will enjoy all of the new and exciting options ashore. Plus, they offer the convenience and affordability of cruising round-trip from New York.'

Norwegian Cruise Line, meanwhile, is operating seven-day Boston-Québec itineraries that can be combined into 14-day round-trips with different ports. Trépanier deems it 'a perfect itinerary to promote the Saint Lawrence.'

The region expects to nearly double its passenger count since last year, reaching approximately 209,000 in 2009. Trépanier thinks the figure can hit 400,000 in five years.

Québec City, expects 101 calls and 97,000 passengers this season, up from 84 calls and 81,000 passengers last year. Turn-arounds will grow from four to at least nine. Montréal projects 55 calls and 37,000 passengers. Maasdam is again the most frequent visitor.

Cruise the Saint Lawrence is glad for big ships. 'But we also need small ships more than ever with this new offer of nine ports,' Trépanier says.

In a five-year development project that began in 2008, emerging ports gained \$150m from federal, provincial and local coffers for infrastructure, marketing and training to support cruise growth.

Some of the projects include Saguenay's pier, Baie-Comeau's just-opened Glacier Exploration Center and a wharf at Sept-Îles that will be ready in

2010. Gaspé's initial investment is going into improving an excursion to Percé that has been called 'one of the most scenic train rides in North America.'

Challenges include extending the season. There are some calls in May and June, very few in July and August, then a big spike in September and October. Other challenges are building up excursions and ensuring good quality from the start at emerging ports, including a network of professional guides and adequate ground transportation.

Tourism is well supported in Québec, Trépanier says. Even in remote regions, 'People believe strongly in the new cruise market. It's not just a vision. We have bookings from lines. This gives



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motivation to the local people and confidence to the government.'

Government backing and teamwork are important. The provincial government supports promotions to consumers, travel agents and media, while the federal government believes strongly in infrastructure development.

'All the stars are aligned for us,' Trépanier enthuses. 'Sometimes it takes years to convince stakeholders, and we have them all around the table.' •