

Spellbound on the

St Lawrence

Susan Parker visited Canada to discover the region and hear how promotion by Cruise St Lawrence has encouraged cruise lines to visit

In addition start-up Pearl Seas Cruises has built the region into the first season for its newbuilding *Pearl Mist* following her delivery on May 9, 2009. Laura Oncea of Pearl Seas Cruises says: "Cruise St Lawrence has been very helpful from the start of the new cruise line. They are currently helping us develop tours and train our sales staff on the different ports of call."

Holland America Line (HAL), Princess Cruises, America Canadian Caribbean Line and Celebrity Cruises are regular visitors to the river and its environs. It is the combination of these, irregulars such as Fred Olsen Cruise Lines, and the newcomers that are putting one or two of the smaller ports on the map.

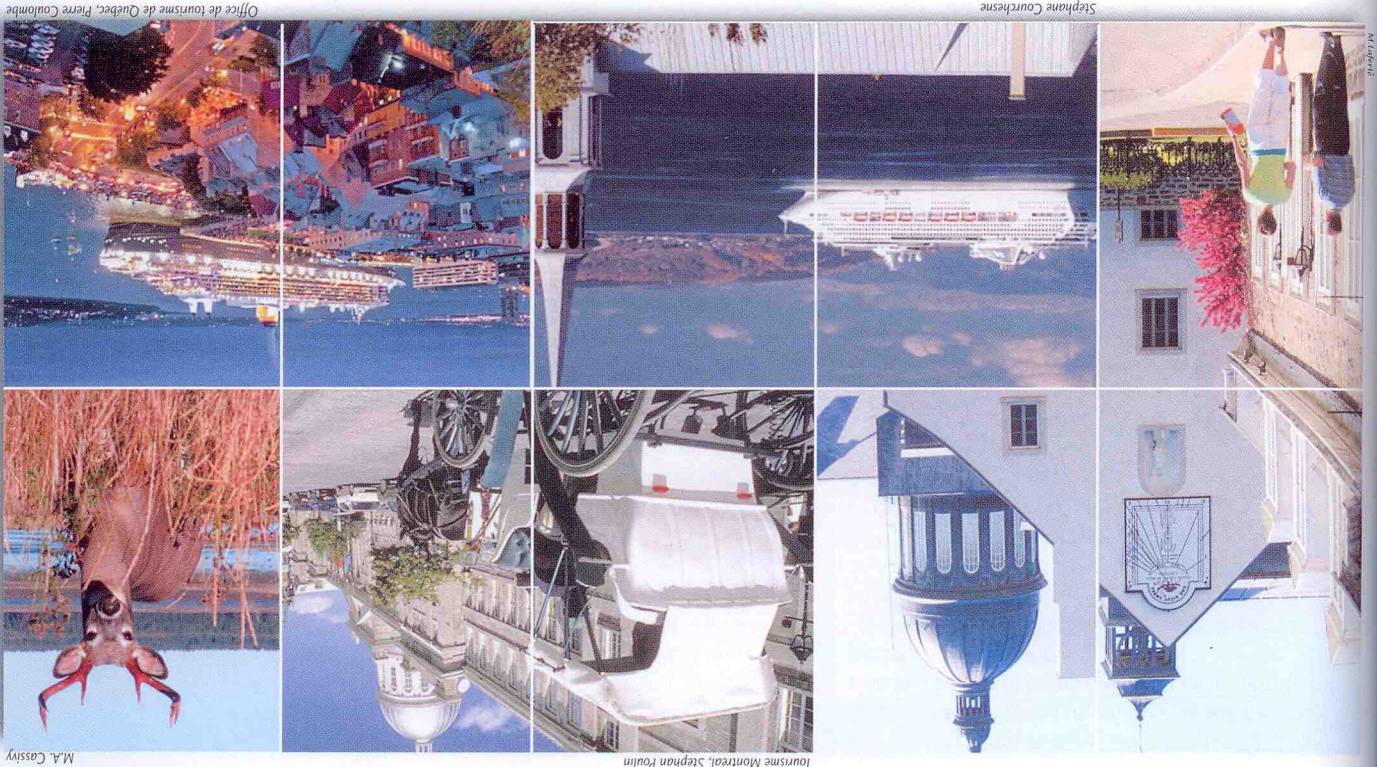
Have St Pierre, for example, having received its first 77 passengers in 2008, will have its community doubled for a first visit in May. LCI was unfortunate enough to be there in the pouring rain, but undaunted our hosts reconfigured the day so that we managed to view all that was on offer. There is no doubt this is a daunting task for such a small and remote community but with the aid of the association, ground agent InterCruise Canada, ship agent Ramsey Greig and plenty of local enthusiasm it was apparent that all will be done to make this a success.

Clockwise from the top
Trois-Rivières;
Sightseeing by carriage in
old Montreal;
Deer on Anticosti Island,
Havre St Pierre;
The port of Quebec;
Ha! Ha! Bay, Saguenay

are beginning to be reaped. In 2008 there were 155 calls with 125,100 passengers and 47,068 crew, which is increasing to 237 calls with 226,356 passengers and 85,497 crew in 2009 (see table). Rene Trepantier, executive director, Cruise the St Lawrence, comments: "Three new cruise lines are showing up in 2009. Holland America and Norwegian also come with new itineraries. All our nine ports of call will be busy in 2009 despite the economical situation."

On LCI's visit to the St Lawrence in September, Carnival Cruise Lines had just confirmed its first call for 2009 with Costa Cruises also coming to the region for the first time and MSC Cruises signing up for 2010.

A next year than ever before and some of this work, more lines are visiting the St Lawrence luck would have it, helped by a lot of hard



Office de tourisme de Québec, Pierre Coulombe

Stéphane Courchesne

M.A. Cassidy

Tourisme Montreal, Séphon Fovlin

Cruise St Lawrence has done a good job in promoting the area to NCL. They did have some influence in securing our visit

– Lily Urrutia, Norwegian Cruise Line



Maritime stew

Tourisme Îles de la Madeleine, P. Arseneau

Quebec, on the other hand, is no stranger to the business and has the advantage of being downriver of the Pont du Quebec bridge to Montreal, where the air draught prevents the progress of many of the larger ships.

Investment in this region is significant with a total of C\$98.5m (\$78.5m) being committed by the government to port facilities and aligned activities over the next five years. This, together with community and private investment, amounts to a total of C\$156m (\$124.4m). The ports in question are Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Saguenay, Baie-Comeau, Sept-Îles, Havre-Saint-Pierre and Gaspésie.

Jean-Pierre Blackburn, minister of labour and minister of Canada economic development, said: "I firmly believe in the vast promise of the international cruise industry and in its potential for fostering the sustainable development of many Quebec communities. Modernising or developing ports of call will help to strengthen and diversify the economic base of these communities. Our government sees this initiative as strategically important because of the numerous spin-offs it will generate by prolonging the tourism season, increasing the number of tourists and reinforcing Quebec's position as a world-class destination."

Crystal Morgan, market manager, planning, deployments and itineraries, Princess Cruises, is pleased with the developments. The company is bringing 3,100-passenger *Crown Princess* to the region for the first time in 2009. She tells *LCI*: "The challenge with deploying our larger vessels to the region is that some of the smaller ports may not be able to provide the infrastructure. This is one advantage of Cruise St Lawrence in that the association works and develops these ports as a collective group. The cruise lines can rely on the association to speak to all the member ports on our behalf rather than speaking with each individual port."

Mr Trepanier updated *LCI* on the development status at the end of November. "Saguenay's wharf is completed and the cruise terminal construction is on its way; Baie-Comeau and Pierre-St-Havre as well. There has been a railroad test done in Sept-Îles [so passengers can travel the 45 minutes from the port to the temporary Innu traditional summer camp]; the local population is preparing for the May 2009 first ever call.

The glacier garden of Baie-Comeau will be a great result. Gaspé will have the train ready for the 2009 season. People are being trained in every port to act as guides and other functions for 2009."

The sourcing and training of guides is a major consideration. Being French-speaking there is the additional need for English-speaking guides in areas with small populations. Promotion Saguenay has teamed up with Intercruises Canada and Cruise St Lawrence in developing an extensive guide training programme. Other ports will duplicate this initiative.

In communities with small populations there are not the number of buses required for the large cruise-ships. In some places the distinctive yellow school buses are being employed when possible to supplement the local supply.

St Lawrence – destination possibilities

The First Nation called it 'the way that walks'. Fed by the Great Lakes, the Saint Lawrence River flows eastward for over 1,200 km along the shores of Montreal, Trois-Rivieres and Quebec. From there it widens into the largest and deepest estuary in the world. It was discovered in 1535 by Jacques Cartier.

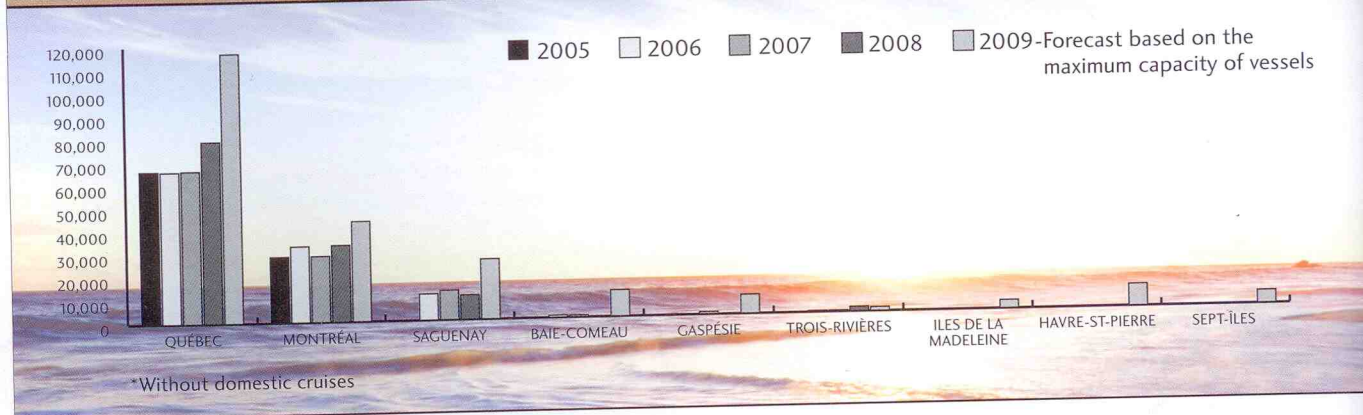
The best way of seeing the region is undoubtedly by ship as the distances are large and the transport various. The flight from Montreal to our first stop, Perce, in the northeast, was about two-and-a-half hours. It is one of three ports (with Gaspé and Chandler) in Gaspésie.

One of the main attractions here is the bird colony on Bonaventure Island which is home to the largest gannet population in the world, 122,000, along with 300,000 other seabirds. The boat trip also takes in the photogenic Perce Rock and, for the lucky, whales. Forillon National Park at the end of the Appalachian Mountains offers more tour possibilities.

Flying across the St Lawrence to Havre St Pierre revealed the vast size of the river. Also impressive was our guest house on the north shore where Quebecois hospitality was at its best, although everywhere we went we were met by warmth and a sense of fun. A welcome contrast to the financial crisis that was breaking in the US and back home in the UK.

The Mingan Archipelago, with its monoliths, is top of the list here for nature but the non-profit, private Mingan Island Cetacean Study gives a fascinating insight

Passengers and crew on the Saint-Lawrence from 2005-2009*



Cruise spending

Direct cruise-related spending increased from C\$965m in 2003 to C\$1.1bn in 2007 for all Canada, according to a study by Business Research and Economic Advisers released by the NorthWest Cruiseship Association in March 2008 in partnership with Cruise St Lawrence, Cruise Newfoundland and Labrador, Atlantic Canada Cruise Association and Cruise BC. Broken down by region, Quebec accounted for C\$78m – a 9% increase – after British Columbia with C\$765m and 21% growth.

Whale watching



Jean-Francois Cagide



round from HAL. It is the only fortified city in North America and is a Unesco international heritage site. A walking tour of the old city is a must and can include the Musee de la Civilisation and the Centre d'Interpretation de Place-Royal, which tells the history of the site considered the birthplace of French civilisation in America. The Chateau Frontenac, opened in 1893 by Canadian Pacific, dominates the skyline.

A walking tour in Trois Rivières (population 125,000) with Francois the priest and a visit with ex-inmate Stephane to the Old Prison, which was closed down only in 1986 after 164 years, are part of the themed tours on offer. This is a town that recognises its limitations and aims at the smaller niche ships. Founded in 1634, it is the second oldest city in Canada. Chez Dany's Sugar Shack is a great place to party while the La Promenade de la Poesie offers a more cultural experience.

There are plans afoot to completely renovate the Ibeville Terminal and Alexandria Pier in Montreal and make it into something more modern and hi-tech. This city of festivals is blessed with a myriad of tour possibilities including the old town and port, the Basilica of Notre-Dame, the botanical gardens and the biodome.

Main picture: the observatory at the Jardin des Glaciers, Bate-Comean Above: Rene Trepantier Left: Innu traditional camp, Sept-Iles, and Perce Rock, Gaspesie

into the river's cetacean population (12 species of whales and two of dolphins). The organisation is intent on ensuring the survival of these mammals alongside shipping. Next up, Rita Mestokoshko gave us a fascinating introduction to the Innu lifestyle in the Ekuantshit community.

For Sept-Iles (population 26,000) the reconstruction of a traditional Innu camp on the Moisie River is a major attraction (see above) with the Musee Shaputuan portraying the Innu life through the seasons. For contrast, La Centre National des Naufrages (National Shipwreck Centre) demonstrates just how busy a waterway the St Lawrence is and has been since 1690. In June 2009, the Centre d'Experience Glaciere will be opened in what was once a church in Bate-Comean (population 23,000). C\$10m has been invested in the Centre and multimedia shows with part of the funding coming from the aluminium plant.

Centre Boreal du Saint-Laurent provides plenty of activities in a landscape shaped by glaciers, including zip-lining, sea kayaking and hiking.

The reception tent at Saguenay (population 169,000) has now been replaced by a new facility showcasing local artisans. A helicopter ride along the fjord as the sun goes down is breathtaking. A visit to the Olivier soap factory hosted by owner Sylvain Laviole, who calls himself 'big man of the soap', was quite an education. A picnic lunch at the economuseum Le Chevrier du Nord goat farm, owned and run by the Pilote family, is a highlight. At La Puiperie de Chicoutimi, founded in 1896 and now a museum, there is the house of Arthur Villeneuve. He spent 5,500 hours painting inside and out with primitive/folk art.

The fortified city of Quebec (population 500,000) celebrated 400 years in 2008 as well as its first turn-



