

## **Prince Rupert adds more cruise ships**

### **Port expects 73 ships carrying a total of 95,000 passengers this cruise season**

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#### **Bruce Constantineau**

Prince Rupert will host roughly one-tenth the number of cruise ship passengers that Vancouver will attract this year but the upstart north coast port considers the upcoming 2005 cruise season a massive step in the right direction.

Port officials expect 73 ships carrying a total of 95,000 passengers will visit their community this year, up from 53 ships and 65,000 passengers in 2004. The estimates this year are about 25 per cent higher than expected when Prince Rupert's new \$9 million Northland cruise terminal opened last year.

"We demonstrated the potential of Prince Rupert as a cruise destination last year so now there's increasing awareness of how the port can fit into Alaska itineraries," said Shaun Stevenson, manager of business development for the Prince Rupert Port Authority.

Most of the 50 larger vessels calling on Prince Rupert this year are Seattle-based cruise ships that have to visit a foreign port on their way to Alaska. The first large cruise ship of the season -- the 2,000-passenger Norwegian Spirit -- arrives May 26.

The port also expects 23 smaller "pocket" cruise ships will visit Prince Rupert this year, including the Executive Explorer, which was the first ship of the season when it arrived with 45 passengers on Monday. Celebrity Cruises will run three-day, four-day and five-day cruises this fall that will call on several B.C. ports, including Prince Rupert.

Stevenson said Prince Rupert eventually wants to compete as an alternative to more developed and congested Alaskan ports, rather than just being a place that fulfills the requirement for U.S.-based ships to make a foreign port of call.

"B.C. has tremendous potential to grow as a cruise destination," he said. "Prince Rupert is just one example of what can happen. Places like Nanaimo and Campbell River and others have many of the same attributes that have contributed to the success of Alaska."

Stevenson said cruise ship activity contributed between \$3 million and \$3.5 million to the Prince Rupert economy last year and expects that with 30,000 more passengers this year, the economic-impact number will rise to around \$5 million. He said the new cruise facility was expected to add \$30 million to the local economy by its tenth year of operation but current trends indicate that will happen by its fifth or sixth year of business.

Stevenson said tourism operators have developed many new shore-excursion products aimed at cruise passengers looking for something to do while they spend from seven to 10 hours in Prince Rupert. Choices include rail trips, grizzly-bear viewing in the Khutzeymateen Valley, boat tours on the Skeena River, whale watching, sea kayaking and First Nations cultural programs.

A \$3 million improvement to the Northland terminal was completed about two weeks ago, with improved roads, walkways, parking, public plazas and tour bus loading areas.

Source: Vancouver Sun