

Cruise Ship Industry Growing in Nanaimo

Nanaimo News Bulletin EDG Column

Thursday, May 14, 2009

Nanaimo's Economic Development Strategy, which was created in 2002, identified tourism as a growth industry in the community. One component of that industry, cruise ship visitations, has seen significant growth over the past five years which will continue with the \$18.5 million development of a cruise ship terminal in Nanaimo's inner harbour.

The cruise ship season which runs from May to October, with most arriving in September and October, began on April 29 with a visit from the Spirit of Endeavor, a Seattle-based pocket cruise ship. A pocket cruise ship is much smaller than a regular cruise ship, with fewer than 150 passengers. Unlike a large cruise ship, it doesn't have as many on-board amenities such as casinos, spas, or theatres. Large cruise ships visiting Nanaimo have between 2,000 and 2,400 passengers, as well as up to 1,000 crew members. This year Nanaimo is confirmed to host five pocket cruise ships and 10 large cruisers.

Regular cruise ship visits to Nanaimo began in 2001 after the Nanaimo Port Authority (NPA) made a request to Cruise West asking them to consider making Nanaimo a port of call. The first large cruise ship arrived in 2003 and since then NPA's regular attendance at the largest cruise industry convention, the Seatrade Cruise Convention in Miami, has resulted in increased interest in Nanaimo by cruise operators.

In 2008, 22 cruise ships came to Nanaimo, bringing 17,135 passengers. To build on the growth in the industry over the past few years, the Nanaimo Port Authority has proposed an \$18.5 million cruise ship terminal, as ships currently anchor in the harbour and tender passengers ashore. According to Doug Peterson, Director of Marketing and Sales for the Nanaimo Port Authority, the new terminal will increase opportunities for passenger spending and shore excursions due to the greater time spent ashore. "It will make it easier to disembark and passengers will have more time to explore the community," said Doug. "Currently the passengers on the last tender in May only get 30 to 45 minutes' visiting time."

Karen Rogers, owner of Newfoundland to Nanaimo gift shop on the waterfront sees an influx of customers in September and October from cruise ship passengers. "I expect that a cruise ship terminal would increase my business," she said "with a shuttle service established to bring visitors from the inner harbour to other parts of the city."

The cruise ship terminal project has received \$13.5 million in funding so far. The Province of BC contributed \$5 million, the Nanaimo Port Authority contributed \$5 million, and the Island Coast Economic Trust contributed \$3.5 million, contingent upon receiving \$5 million from the federal government. Bernie Dumas, President & CEO of the Nanaimo Port Authority, is hopeful that this good news will be announced in the weeks to come, allowing the development plans to proceed with a tender for construction going out in late summer and a project completion date set for the fall of 2010.

"With the last funding component received and support from the cruise ship operators, the new cruise ship terminal will become a major economic driver in Nanaimo," said Dumas. "Approximately 22,000 cruise ship passengers are expected to visit Nanaimo in 2009. We hope to double that within 3-5 years."