



For Immediate Release

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Successful 2025 cruising season builds Port Milwaukee momentum for 2026

American Cruise Lines to join 2026 Milwaukee cruising lineup

MILWAUKEE – Port Milwaukee proudly closed another successful cruising season, welcoming more than 11,000 passengers to the City of Milwaukee throughout the 2025 season. With the conclusion of the 2025 season, the stage is now set for a robust 2026 season, where a new cruise dock will open and a new company will launch itineraries out of Milwaukee.

Port Milwaukee kicked off its cruise season on April 28, with the arrival of the *Viking Octantis*. *Hanseatic Inspiration* concluded the 2025 Great Lakes cruising season on October 9. This year, Milwaukee welcomed 11,096 passengers who traveled to-or-from the city via international cruise ships. This represents a total of 22 calls between six vessels that hosted itineraries.

The 2025 cruise season has created a \$2.5 million local economic impact and is projected to be approximately \$3.5 million next year.

“It has been another tremendous cruising season for the City of Milwaukee, and I am proud of the Port’s role in strengthening our city as a premier destination while expanding Wisconsin’s reputation as a place worth visiting,” **Milwaukee Mayor Cavalier Johnson** said. “The economic impact of this growth reaches well beyond our city limits, and I look forward to building on this momentum into the 2026 season.”

Port Milwaukee’s third designated cruise dock, the South Shore Cruise Dock, is slated to be operational during the 2026 cruising season. The new dock will serve the Great Lakes’ largest cruise liners. With approximately 19,000 passengers expected to visit Milwaukee in 2026, 62 cruise ship visits have already been scheduled.

“There is an incredible sense of excitement as Port Milwaukee looks ahead to the 2026 cruise season,” **Port Director Jackie Q. Carter** said. “Each year, the Port continues to build on its success by expanding its reach and enhancing the visitor experience. That steady growth is why we’re confident Milwaukee is poised for another outstanding year ahead.”

American Cruise Lines will launch two new cruise options from Milwaukee in 2026. The new itineraries are the company’s first Great Lakes ventures, and will be operated by the *American Patriot*. The vessel has a 130 passenger capacity. Six calls, all turnaround visits, have been scheduled to Port Milwaukee for the upcoming season. According to [American Cruise Lines](#), “this marks the first time in decades that an American ship will offer domestic cruises in the growing Great Lakes cruise market.” American Cruise Lines is the largest river cruise line in the country with American-built ships and domestic itineraries.

“The news of more cruise ship visits in 2026 plus the opening of the new cruise dock mark an exciting next chapter for Milwaukee’s growing cruise industry,” **President of the Board of Harbor Commissioners Tim Hoelter** said. “This reflects Port Milwaukee’s commitment to providing first-class experiences to visitors and partners. I am thrilled to see new travelers discover all that our city has to offer and thank the Port staff for their drive to make it all happen.”

Several ongoing efforts remain underway to promote the passenger cruise business in Milwaukee and throughout the Great Lakes. Port Milwaukee is the founder of the Milwaukee Cruise Collaborative, a local group promoting the city as a cruise destination. The Collaborative, which includes a cross-section of the local hospitality industry, has planned, promoted, and prepared for increased Great Lakes cruising passengers. VISIT Milwaukee and various local stakeholders are also proud partners in promoting Great Lakes cruising activity in the city.

The Port is also a participant in the Cruise the Great Lakes initiative of the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers. The Port previously signed a Cruise the Great Lakes pledge to promote environmental stewardship practices and efforts.

Port Milwaukee is an economic entity of City government governed by the seven-member Board of Harbor Commissioners, a panel appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Common Council. It administers operations on the 467 acres that make up the Port. It promotes regional shipping and commerce by providing access to domestic and international ships, rail, and over-the-road transportation.