

CRUISE GATEWAY NEWS

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'SUSTAINABLE' CRUISE EXCURSIONS: FINDING THE BALANCE



Quite and harmonious landscapes, remote beauty spots, cultural cities and towns, traditional buildings and historic sites... all are much sought after by the world's cruise lines, looking for unique experiences for their passengers.

But this raises a dilemma, as delegates heard during a Cruise Gateway conference held in Norway. How can those sites, whether fragile buildings or sensitive countryside, be protected from the damage that could be caused by too many visitors? How can a beautiful, peaceful landscape (and its residents) cope with the influx of thousands of visitors and still retain its character and special qualities, for now and for the future?

The issues were considered in depth at the conference, which was entitled 'Sustainable Shore Excursions' and hosted by Cruise Destination Hardangerfjord.

The conference agenda featured speakers from both cruise lines and cruise destinations, with a

series of informative and inspiring presentations. The wider programme gave delegates a flavour of the shore excursions available for cruise lines in the beautiful surroundings of Hardangerfjord; activity options for cruise passengers include cycling, walking and kayaking, while popular excursions include the Vøringfoss Waterfall, Kjeåsen mountain farm, Sima hydroelectric power plant, Hardangervidda Nature Centre or the Hardanger Juice & Cider Factory.

Hardangerfjord's five small ports will receive 122 cruise calls this year, carrying about 175,000 cruise passengers – 70,000 more than last year, said Anved Johan Tveit, mayor of Eidfjord. In a move to protect this sensitive environment, a limit has been imposed of no more than 4,000 passengers in one day.

"Our profile is harmony in association with great nature – no congestion or mass tourism," he said. "Our nature and cultural heritage are too valuable to be spoiled by a large number of tourists every day. But, at the same time, we are proud of our attractions – so our aim is a balance between use and protection."

If Hardangerfjord is to remain a tourism destination for the future, he added: "We have to find a way to preserve the landscape and culture, the main reasons for visiting us."

Ingunn Sornes, of Innovation Norway, described the country's strategy of sustainability as a baseline for all tourism development. A system of 'Sustainable Destination' certification has attracted international interest, she added. This is based on the criteria of nature, culture and environment; social values; and economic viability, all re-certified every three years. "We may need extra criteria for cruise destinations, because of the special challenges there," she said.

Cruise Norway managing director Wenche Eeg Nygård discussed the importance of protecting Norway as the world's best nature-based cruise destination. Key actions included setting upper limits on passenger numbers in order to spread the traffic, and respecting heritage and authentic culture, she said. However, a 'sustainable' shore excursion had to be a profitable one, she emphasised.

From the cruise industry, Gela Gudlat of AIDA Cruises and Samantha Richardson of Carnival UK both gave their views on how the cruise industry was working to achieve environmental protection and balance, from 'greener' ships to 'greener' excursion ideas.

"We as a cruise operator depend on intact nature and clean seas, fresh air and clean beaches," said Gela Gudlat.

Samantha Richardson said: "We try to avoid tours that we believe will cause damage to the natural environment and we try to be supportive of those providers that adopt a very sustainable approach."

She explained Carnival's programme of 'Green World Tours', including 'Worthy Cause Tours' when passengers can visit a charitable project, for example, and tours with 'a hint of green'. On more traditional excursions, meanwhile, timings could be adjusted to minimise impact – avoiding traffic congestion and also creating an evenly spread demand on popular visitor attractions, she said.

CRUISE GATEWAY: THE PROJECT EXPLAINED

Cruise Gateway North Sea, an EU Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme project, was set up to consider ways of encouraging and promoting much more cruise activity in the NSR.

The project partners have been considering a broad range of topics linked to cruise and

cruise potential, including joint lobbying and marketing, the creation of a regional maritime identity and innovative ideas for passenger excursions, as they seek ways to develop the NSR as a cruise destination in its own right.

The common thread through all of this is sustainability – including the promotion of

environmental awareness and eco-friendly transport structures, and avoiding congestion.

Cruise Gateway is now nearing the end of its programme of research, workshops and best practice visits. The Cruise Gateway closing conference will be held in Rotterdam on 12-13 September 2013.

ABERDEENSHIRE CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON CRUISE 'BEST PRACTICE'

Cruise Gateway partners travelled to Scotland for a 'Cruise and Accessibility' conference and best practice tour in Aberdeenshire at the end of May; they learned about the area's success in attracting cruise calls, and the challenges that come with that success.



The Royal residence of Balmoral, the clifftop fortress of Dunnottar and numerous other castles, gardens and other world-class visitor attractions have put Aberdeenshire on the map in the cruise ship sector.

When the Hurtigruten ship MS Fram called into Aberdeen on a cruise from Hamburg to Iceland, its passengers were treated to shore excursions which included Balmoral and Dunnottar, which is leading the Visit Scotland tourist poll for nominating a Scottish 'Eighth Wonder of the World'.

On a visit to Crathes Castle, passengers were accompanied by a BBC film crew which is making a second series of The Harbour, the popular television programme about the life of Aberdeen Harbour.

The common theme in the Hurtigruten passenger trips was summed up by the region's slogan, 'Aberdeenshire, from mountains to sea – the very best of Scotland'.

The Aberdeen conference, taking place shortly after the MS Fram call, picked up on the Cruise Gateway project's central themes, of encouraging and promoting much more cruise activity in the North Sea Region while also focusing on accessibility and sustainability, including the promotion of environmental awareness and eco-friendly transport structures.

Notably, the Aberdeenshire Northern Coastline was recently listed in National Geographic's top 12 worldwide coastal destinations, chosen by a panel of 340 experts in sustainable tourism and destination stewardship.

The agenda included a presentation by Andrea Nicholas, managing director of Green Business UK, which runs the national sustainable tourism certification scheme for the UK.

The partner delegates, from Denmark, England, Germany, Norway and Sweden, learned about the accessibility of the Aberdeenshire landscape and attractions through the ports of both Peterhead and

Aberdeen. "These ports have seen a steady growth in cruise calls in the past few years; year they will host 15 cruise ship calls between them, and the number is forecast to increase significantly in the longer term, as a result of initiatives like the Cruise Gateway project," said Philip Smart, representing Aberdeenshire Council.

Sebastian Doderer, representing Cruise Gateway's lead partner, Port of Hamburg Marketing, said: "We chose Aberdeenshire for our best practice tour for the twin factors of the quality of the attractions on offer and the certification of attractions for Green Tourism, in which Scotland is a world leader. We could see first-hand what makes this such an attractive yet sustainable destination, with many iconic attractions on which to build a North Sea cruising package."

Cruise Gateway delegates were impressed by the density of attractions, he added – not just the well-known whisky, golf and Royal connections, but also their quality and their grading for environmental sustainability.

"I feel this approach would underpin the development of the cruise product within the North Sea Basin, especially with the coming pressures of Sulphur Emission Control Areas and the growth of interest in no-fly and more environmentally sustainable holidays."



Cruise Gateway
North Sea Project partners

Lead Partner:



Partners:

Port of Kiel (Germany)
Columbus Cruise Center
Bremerhaven (Germany)
Bremen Senate Department for
Economy and Ports (Germany)
Cruise Destination Hardangerfjord
(Norway)
City of Gothenburg (Sweden)
Copenhagen Malmö Port AB
(Denmark / Sweden)
Port of Esbjerg (Denmark)
City of Antwerp / Tourism (Belgium)
Cruise Port Rotterdam (Netherlands)
Haven Gateway Partnership
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Aberdeenshire Council (Scotland)

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