

Salem touts new wharf, lively offerings beyond witch history

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PHOTO: RICHARD SCOTT



Salem Harbor

As its \$15m to \$18m wharf project unfolds, the historic port of Salem, Mass., is reaching out to cruise lines. City officials hope to attract a bigger operator for tender calls and lines with smaller ships that are able to go alongside.

'We're setting our sights on Holland America Line because they are already going to Gloucester and are sending some of their excursions here. We would love to be an option,' said Kate Fox, executive director of Destination Salem.

Salem holds potential as a transit call alternative to Boston or Gloucester, according to HAL's Simon Douwes, director of deployment and itinerary planning, adding: 'I am sure that the port will be able to attract some

calls.'

American Cruise Lines may be a candidate in the small ship field, and it is hoped that a past customer, Blount Small Ship Adventures, will return.

Fox and Kathy Winn of Salem's Department of Planning attended the Canada/New England Cruise Symposium in New York last month where they spoke with cruise lines. The symposium also led to an Intercruises team visiting Salem to assess further excursion opportunities.

Famous for the 17th-century witch trials, the city is an international visitor draw with its Salem Witch Museum, Peabody Essex Museum and The House of the Seven Gables, the inspiration for native son Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel of the same name. Part of the waterfront is a Maritime National Historic Site. Other attractions include architecture, galleries, shops, festivals and a thriving culinary scene.

'Most people who come want to learn about the witch trials of 1692,' said Fox, adding that the city is keen to show off other attributes and looks forward to working with Intercruises and the lines on developing more options.

'Salem as a destination continues to grow and expand. There are so many new businesses. It has a vibrant feel,' she told Seatrade Insider.

'We've always had the history. Now, there's new retail. There's a buzz in downtown Salem,' Winn added.

The wharf project will create a T-shaped pier with three slips, but only small vessels—up to 300 feet/91 meters—can go alongside. However, the deepwater (38 feet/11.6 meters) anchorage can handle much larger ships for tender operations.

Landside improvements completed in June include the installation of a storm water system, water and sewer service and electrical conduit. Seawall construction was begun, and the site was brought to final grade, with base pavement and striping undertaken.

An interim terminal building is installed with ADA-compliant restrooms, ticketing area and offices. Finishing touches are being put on the building, which is about one week away from occupancy, Winn said.

The next phase, to begin over the winter, will construct the approach section and the first 200-foot section of pier. Floating docks and gangways will be installed at this new section. There will be limited dredging.

Salem's goal is to have the facility fully operational by 2014.

With Boston set to host the Canada/New England Cruise Symposium in 2013, it is hoped Salem can gain more exposure and awareness from cruise executives visiting the region.

Longer term, there may be possibilities for further cruise expansion. Salem Wharf is located beside a power plant that will be shutting down. The plant has a dock that handles large coal-carrying ships. Winn said it might be feasible to incorporate that facility, giving the potential for Salem to one day dock larger passenger vessels.

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