

Sailing home to Penang

Welcome reception planned for cruise liner's homecoming

PENANGITES who miss the sight of that brightly lit ocean liner cruising by the Esplanade and Gurney Drive almost every evening can rejoice — Superstar Libra is coming back to make Penang her home port.

She will be back from mid-September and few are happier than Penang Port Commission (PPC) chairman Tan Teik Cheng (*pic*).

“The cruise ship will be with us at least until end-2017 and she will connect our island to Phuket and Krabi in Thailand.

“We invited the cruise operator to return to Penang and we are happy to see the ship return,” he said, adding that the port planned to hold a welcome reception when she calls.

Superstar Libra had homeported here from Dec 31, 2010, to July 18 last year when it left to

operate from Xiamen International Cruise Centre.

With her return, Tan said the cruise will make 4D/3N trips to Phuket and Krabi on top of three high seas cruises every week.

Superstar Libra's return is expected to boost the cruise ship market for Penang again.

“When ocean liners make Penang a port-of-call, the passengers will have only eight to nine hours to explore Penang.

“But when a liner is homeported here, passengers from around the world will fly in to travel to Thailand.

“They will come in advance and enjoy our island before they



go sailing,” Tan explained in a press conference yesterday.

He advised tourism players, particularly in the George Town World Heritage Site, to keep tabs on the ship's movements to benefit from the spikes in visitor

numbers.

“The ship will leave for overnight trips to the high seas every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday night. On Saturdays, it will sail to Thailand.

“Travel agents may bundle hawker food and heritage tours with the cruises, so get ready,” he said.

The 10-deck liner can carry

about 1,500 passengers per trip.

But even without Superstar Libra, he noted that Swettenham Pier still saw an impressive jump in passenger arrivals via liners dropping by from around the world.

He said the island had nonstop growth in cruise passenger arrivals from 2010 (102,248 passengers) to 2015 (238,115).

“Only 78 liners called on Penang in 2010, compared with 141 last year. This number will grow again this year,” he said.

Superstar Libra will also bring welcome revenue to Swettenham Pier operations.

When she left last year, it was reported that she had contributed about RM6mil in berthing revenues yearly, which was about half of the terminal's collection.



(Above) The Superstar Libra will return to make Penang its home port from mid-September. (Right) Filepic of crew members performing on the pool deck of the luxury cruise liner.

