

Cruise ship season makes port

Penang set to welcome ocean liner boom ferrying thousands amid year-end holidays

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GEORGE TOWN: With many cruise ships calling on Penang, the last few weeks of the year are a busy time here.

Among them is the *Anthem of the Seas* by the Royal Caribbean, which berthed at the Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal (SPCT) yesterday.

The ship has a maximum capacity of 4,120 guests and a dedicated crew of 1,546 members.

Its arrival was met with great enthusiasm by local trishaw riders, who gathered early to welcome the disembarking tourists.

A total of 25 trishaws were chartered through Saw Chin Choon, who manages a group of trishaw men.

Their two-hour tour services offered tourists a chance to explore the George Town Unesco World Heritage Site.

"Cruise passengers tend to make prior reservations in large groups.

"This gives the riders a chance to meet travellers from all over the world.

"These tourists often tip generously if they enjoy the ride, which is a much-appreciated bonus in supporting our livelihoods," Saw said.

To accommodate the influx of visitors, buses lined up at the terminal's entrance to transport tourists to key attractions such as Penang Hill, the Esplanade and heritage-rich city tours.

Sean Phillip, 74, a retiree from the United States, is among those exploring the local sights on foot.

"I've visited several Asian countries, but this is my first time in Malaysia.

"We're thrilled to stop in Penang, where people of different races and cultures come together to form such a vibrant society,"



Mighty vessel: The cruise ship 'Anthem of the Seas' docking at Penang's Swettenham Pier Cruise Terminal. — ANDY LO TERN CHERN/The Star

said Phillip, accompanied by his family.

Some of the tourists chartered their own private tours, as the ship only made a port of call in Penang for a day.

Its stop in Penang is part of a 14-day one-way journey from Dubai to Singapore, with visits to Mumbai and Kochi in India, as well as Phuket, Thailand.

The ship's huge presence also drew the attention of locals, who gathered at the Esplanade to admire its grandeur.

Penang Port Commission chairman Datuk Yeoh Soon Hin said there will be 26 cruise calls into SPCT from yesterday till the end of the year.

"Among those making their maiden calls are *Anthem Of The Seas* (yesterday), *Viking Venus* (Nov 29), *Azamara Pursuit* (Dec 6), *Blue Dream Melody* (Dec 14) and *Aida Stella* (Dec 28).

"Other cruise ships berthing at SPCT during the period include *Genting Dream* and *Celebrity Millennium*," he added.

Yeoh said that cruises in Asia, particularly in destinations like Penang, increased in the fourth quarter due to favourable weather and the region's appeal to tourists during the holiday season.

"Cruise lines are expanding in Asia to meet rising demand from local and international travellers

seeking warmer, culturally rich destinations - during colder months elsewhere.

"Although these cruises may not operate at full passenger capacity, we hope the tourists disembarking will enjoy our hospitality and, most importantly, contribute to our local tourism economy," he said.

The arrival of these cruise passengers was a delight for trishaw riders, who eagerly awaited the opportunity to transport tourists through the heritage enclave.

"Most trishaw riders are elderly and can only work for a few hours a day to earn a living.

"The large influx of passengers gives all of us a chance to take at

least one ride with customers," said a rider who only wished to be known as Tua Pui, 40, in Penang Road.

Another trishaw rider, who preferred to remain anonymous, said he charges RM80 per hour for city tours.

"We welcome large groups because they often take several trishaws at once.

"Without them, we'd just be waiting around," he said.

For 76-year-old trishaw rider known only as Ahmad, foreign tourists are his favourite due to their generosity.

"Those arriving on luxury cruise ships tend to leave us bigger tips after the ride," he said.