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WJZ TV coverage of Celebrity event

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Celebrity Cruises Launches Another Ship Reporting

Pat Warren BALTIMORE (WJZ)

Reporting Pat Warren

Celebrity Cruises launches another ship from the Port of Baltimore and another economic boom for the state. Pat Warren has more on how this type of tourism is affecting Maryland's economy.

Cost and convenience are making millions. The 1,800 passengers about to leave on the Celebrity Mercury are living proof.

Nothing says "cruise" like a cocktail--unless it's the food. And leaving from Baltimore makes some passengers even happier.

"We've left from New York before and it's the pits. You have to take a bus or drive and worry about parking your vehicle," said Jerry Garrett.

This is the Celebrity Mercury's inaugural cruise from the Port of Baltimore and the price is right.

"I think in general it's had an impact on everything. Our ships go out full and I think we have a value proposition for vacationers. People do not want to give up their vacations and cruising is one of the best values you can get," said Sherry Pasternak.

It helps the economy, too.

"Going from about \$63 million last year to about \$152 million this year and an increase in jobs, as well," said Richard Scher.

Twenty-seven cruise ships left the Port of Baltimore last year. This year, 81 ships left.

Celebrity has 12 cruises leaving from the Port of Baltimore.

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Baltimore Sun

A boost to the port

A Mercury ship departing today brings cruise lines in the city to five

Cruises By Lorraine Mirabella | lorraine.mirabella@baltsun.com

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As the Celebrity Mercury prepared to sail from Baltimore on Monday afternoon, passengers strolled along the Sky Deck, peeked into the martini bar and eyed the casino. Waiters in the Manhattan restaurant served the first three-course lunch of the 12-night trip.

Settling into their stateroom, Charles and Jeanne Mewshaw got started on their favorite part of cruising: relaxing. The Catonsville couple, ages 92 and 80, were among more than 1,800 passengers on Celebrity's first cruise from Baltimore in five years. And, like other guests, they had chosen this vacation as much for its port of departure as for its Caribbean destinations.

"We're so glad Celebrity finally decided to give Baltimore another chance," said Jeanne Mewshaw, who said navigating airports to fly to a cruise port has become too difficult. In Locust Point, "it's so convenient."

Celebrity discontinued cruises out of Baltimore in 2004 as part of a corporate plan to offer more trips to Europe and Alaska and fewer to the Caribbean. But now, with the recession prompting more cruise passengers to drive, rather than fly, to departure cities, Celebrity is seeing an uptick in interest in its Caribbean trips, said Michelle Homoky, Celebrity's director of sales for the Southeast.

The Mercury's tour, with stops in St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. Kitts, St. John's and St. Maarten, with three nights at sea at either end, was nearly sold out, Celebrity officials said.

"When you have drive-market ports, people will take advantage of cruises," said Homoky, who added that the Locust Point terminal draws vacationers from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware as well as throughout Maryland. The Mercury will sail from Baltimore a dozen more times through February, with fares averaging \$899 to \$1,000 per person, she said.

Thanks to Celebrity's return, along with substantial new business this year from Carnival Cruise Lines, Baltimore anticipates record numbers of both cruise departures and passengers for 2009, said James J. White, executive director of the Maryland Port Administration.

Carnival began offering cruises from Baltimore for the first time this year, starting in April. Both Carnival and Celebrity will offer winter sailings from Locust Point through February, representing the first-ever winter cruise business for the port, White said. Other shipping lines offering cruises out of the Locust Point passenger terminal include Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Lines and Dellmann.

"The cruise lines finally were listening to us in terms of just how huge the consumer market is here and how affluent the state of Maryland is as far as per family income," White said. "That is combined with us sitting right in the middle of the Baltimore-Washington corridor, with 8 million people," and the greater Philadelphia market.

This year through October, 125,248 passengers left Baltimore on 60 cruises, surpassing the previous record of 104,253 boardings on 60 cruises set in 2004. The port anticipates a total of about 165,000 passengers on 81 cruises by the end of the year, White said. That compares with a total of 27 cruise sailings in 2008, he said.

White said the cruise business will generate an estimated \$152 million in impact to the local economy, such as in hotel stays, restaurant meals and retail sales, compared with economic impact of \$63 million last year. The port's cruise-related jobs have increased to 1,550 this year, up from 700 last year.

On Monday, the popularity of cruising was on full display at the passenger terminal, where a steel drum band greeted passengers being checked through security before boarding the ship.

To mark the cruise line's return to Baltimore, Celebrity hosted a lunch and tours for travel agents and loyal Celebrity cruise passengers, in the hours before the ship departed. They were shown Mercury amenities such as a theater, a cinema, a casino, a fitness center, spa, pools, a jogging track and upscale shops.

Among them were Bonnie Howatt of Pasadena and her husband, who have cruised eight times with Celebrity, including one time years ago from Baltimore. Howatt said she liked the convenience of driving to Baltimore for a cruise, even though it meant days of sailing before reaching the first port of call.

"I love days at sea," she said.