

## WHAT WE HEARD:

# Cruise Engagement Sessions Winter 2024/2025



Greater Victoria Harbour Authority is holding engagement sessions with member agencies, local businesses, community members and First Nation partners over winter 2024/2025 to explore cruise industry opportunities and challenges. The sessions help GVHA engage with organizations and individuals already involved in the cruise sector, and also to hear from those who want to be more connected with the cruise industry. Sessions have provided a forum to discuss current and future opportunities, celebrate successes, explore frustrations, discuss options for ongoing engagement and communication, and to work together to identify strategies to benefit Greater Victoria.

**At all sessions, GVHA shared its draft cruise strategy, which focuses on achieving four pillars:**

<b>Marquee Cruise Destination:</b>	<b>Seamless Cruise Logistics Hub:</b>	<b>Model for Sustainable Cruise Tourism:</b>	<b>Competitive Port-of-Call:</b>
Demonstrating that Greater Victoria is a great place to live and visit.	Ensuring that the port and local industry are able to service the needs of the industry.	Optimizing environmental, social and economic community benefits.	Ensuring cruise lines and industry providers can reliably operate their businesses.

Themes:

## Cruise vessel arrival times

There is consensus that day and evening calls of cruise ships have a very different impact/dynamic and that businesses involved in the cruise industry need different strategies to optimize impact of passengers depending on vessel arrival times.

Participants shared a strong desire to encourage cruise lines to arrive earlier and to have longer stays in port. Participants indicated that later arrival times result in less passengers making their way into downtown. Some businesses have made the decision to stay open until 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. and indicated they have benefited from that decision. Other businesses indicated evening staffing is an issue, return on investment marginal, and staff safety is a concern. Some participants raised the opportunity for vessels to stay later (past midnight) to allow passengers to spend more time in local restaurants and bars. GVHA also shared information on reasons that cruise lines arrive in the evening at times (such as slower sailing speeds to reduce emissions) and how Victoria fits into the Alaskan cruise itinerary.

*"Even extending stays by one or two hours would help. It's such a small window (at times)."*

*"We need activities that fit into the nights."*

*"Late arrivals impact staffing. Sometimes we can't staff our locations. Staff take buses home so that depends on BC Transit service. We also have concerns about safety for staff at night."*

## Shuttle bus stop

There are varying opinions on the location of the shuttle bus stop used by PNWTS (Pacific Northwest Transportation Services) to shuttle cruise passengers between The Breakwater District at Ogden Point and downtown. Participants shared that the stop, which is currently located by the Empress, isn't optimal for several reasons, including: cruise passengers are nervous about walking further into downtown and/or Chinatown and have concerns over missing the shuttle return to their cruise ship; passenger congestion at the shuttle stop suggests overcrowding/over-tourism in an already-busy area of downtown; passengers aren't sure where to find additional shopping options and don't travel much further than Government Street. City of Victoria representatives were able to share information at one of the sessions that indicated there are plans for further engagement on the shuttle stop in the months ahead.

*"The closure of Government Street (to traffic) created an issue for us. Can't there be multiple drop-off locations?"*

## Cruise terminal appearance and activation

Participants shared opinions on the appearance of the cruise terminal arrival area. Feedback generally indicated that there is an opportunity to improve the aesthetic and functionality of the cruise terminal, with an emphasis on a Welcome to Canada/Victoria message. Participants reported that the cruise terminal is not welcoming, doesn't adequately promote Canada, B.C. or Victoria, and feels quite industrial. Participants shared that they would encourage improvements that create a more welcoming environment for cruise passengers. Suggested solutions included better signage, including directional signs, more impactful Welcome to Canada messaging, music, return of cruise market, enhanced lighting, additional opportunities for businesses to promote their offerings, market/festival-type environment on cruise days, and an enhanced Indigenous presence at the terminal.

*"We need a strengthened relationship with GVHA to discuss how to improve the facility."*

*"We need a fully animated port."*

*"We need better facilities that are more modern and pretty."*

*"Ogden Point is an eye-sore. What happened to the plan to rejuvenate Ogden Point?"*

## Destination and attraction marketing

Participants noted that there are opportunities to improve information shared with passengers to focus on what's open during specific port calls. Participants also discussed onboard shopping programs, onboard destination marketing opportunities, and opportunities to improve what information is shared with passengers as they disembark with the goal of encouraging passengers to visit businesses across Victoria. Participants also noted that there is an opportunity to better animate downtown Victoria to encourage passenger dispersion and flow.

*"Downtown Victoria needs to be way more vibrant, open, inviting, and fun in the evenings."*

*"How is Victoria being sold on board ships?"*

*"We need equality for all tour businesses at the cruise terminal."*

*"Who is advertising to cruise passengers and letting them know what's open?"*

*"Cruise passengers haven't got any idea about what they can do. Some don't know it's an island. People get off an 8 p.m. boat and then just walk around aimlessly."*

*"We need better lighting and bathrooms for ship guests along the whole route downtown."*

## Ongoing engagement and communication

Participants shared that they welcome ongoing opportunities to engage on cruise. There was a stated desire to explore the re-invigoration of the Victoria Cruise Industry Alliance, and also to create regular sessions where businesses and community members can come together to share information and best practices, learn about the cruise market and opportunities, and co-develop solutions to optimize benefits for Greater Victoria. Participants also indicated that they would welcome ongoing communication about the cruise industry, including statistics and data such as number of passengers on specific vessels in port, updates on the percentage of passengers who disembark into Victoria, percentage of passengers who return to Victoria after a cruise, etc. Participants also stated interest in learning more about the cruise sector in general, and having better opportunities to connect with cruise line leadership to understand what drives itineraries, the future of cruise in Alaska, and cruise industry trends. GVHA will offer ongoing engagement opportunities to continue the dialogue and enhance cruise-related communication.

*"Let's continue with the open collaboration and engagement with local partners and the community."*

*"I really appreciated the schedule coming out early – better communication on all fronts is very helpful."*

*"We need to make sure there is continued engagement and acknowledgment to the residential community."*

## Growth opportunities

Participants shared a desire to expand sophisticated shore excursions (known as shorex) options that meet the demands of cruise passengers. There was discussion on how it takes time and investment to build out shorex programs and that it can take years, even decades, to build products and relationships with cruise lines. Participants indicated that a community education or information session on how to build shorex offerings would be beneficial.

Participants who provide services such as tugboat and maintenance repairs shared that there are potential growth opportunities to expand technical services at Ogden Point. There was interest in additional conversations on how to expand services, volumes and capabilities available at Ogden Point.

*"We need increased wet berth utilization during cruise shoulder/off-season."*

*"We need to convince cruise lines that we can be a home port."*

*"Alaska will have capacity issues. We should be more welcoming to the cruise lines. I expect to see a pinch in Alaska, and we may be able to benefit from that."*

*"We need to build out more experiences and attractions in Victoria."*

*"We need infrastructure improvements at Ogden Point for maintenance work."*

## By the numbers:

4

GVHA hosted four engagement sessions in November and December 2024.

75

Approximately 75 people participated in the sessions.

100%

In an exit survey, 100 percent of survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that the sessions were useful.

97%

97 percent survey participants indicated that they learned something new about cruise at the sessions.

## Who has GVHA engaged to date?

GVHA extended a broad invitation. Attendees included representatives from City of Victoria, Chamber of Commerce, Destination Greater Victoria, the Downtown Victoria Business Association, the City of Victoria, Songhees Nation, Canada Border Services, SSA Marine, PNWTS, Tymac, businesses who operate as licensed operators at Odgen Point, food and beverage companies including pubs and hotels, and Government Street retailers, among other participants.

## What's next?

- Further engagement sessions will be organized in February and March. Please email [communications@gvha.ca](mailto:communications@gvha.ca) to be included.
- GVHA will also be engaging directly with Songhees Nation and Xwsepsum Nation over the coming months on the Cruise Engagement Strategy.
- Mechanism to maintain ongoing engagement and information sharing related to cruise to be established (through Victoria Cruise Industry Alliance or other group).
- Action item list and work plan to be established to follow up on actionable items from the engagement sessions. Items for follow up will need input and support from multiple partners/organizations/businesses.
- Cruise market will be brought back for 2025 season.
- GVHA to finalize cruise strategy and share back with partners.