

● SHIPS ● PORTS ● SCHEDULES ● PRICES

CRUISE ROUNDUP[®]
ALASKA 2016

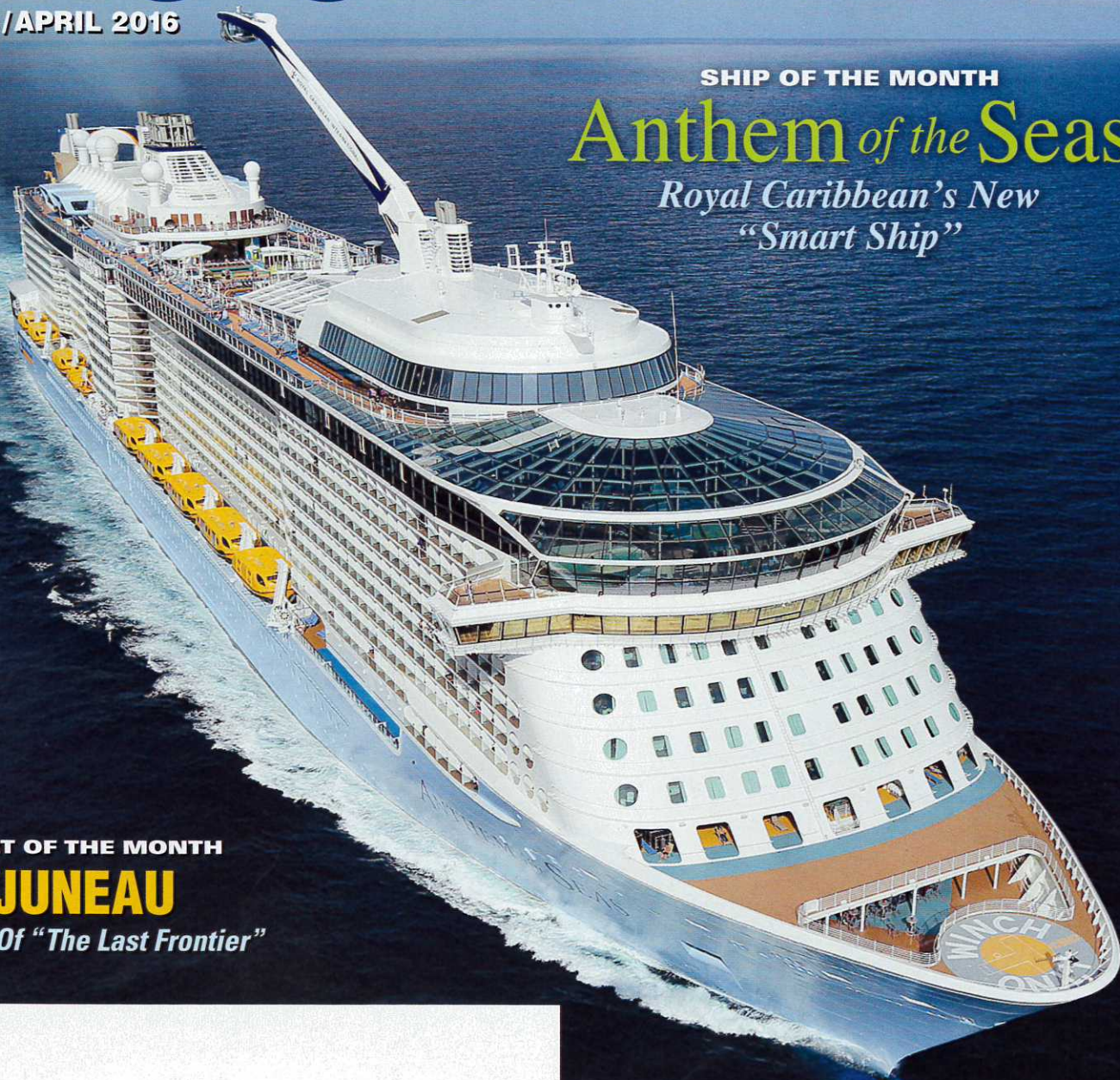
CRUISE TRAVEL

MARCH/APRIL 2016

SHIP OF THE MONTH

Anthem of the Seas

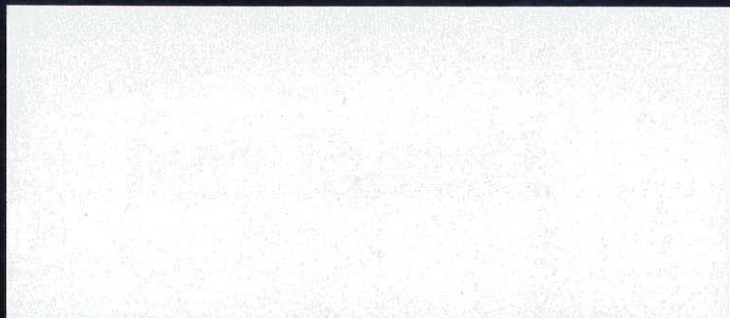
Royal Caribbean's New
"Smart Ship"



PORT OF THE MONTH

JUNEAU

Capital Of "The Last Frontier"



CRUISE OF THE MONTH

TULIPS & WINDMILLS

On The Waterways Of Holland



Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau

Cruise liners docked in Galveston, as seen from the wheel of the tall ship *Elissa*, an exhibit at the Texas Seaport Museum, a short stroll from the cruise terminals.

GALVESTON

*Texas City Marks 15 Years Of Year-Round Cruising
And Looks To The Future*

By M.T. Schwartzman

Located on the northwest corner of the Gulf Of Mexico, the Texas port of Galveston is one of the true success stories of Homeland Cruising. In September 2015, the port celebrated 15 years of year-round service to the region's cruise travelers. In a statement issued at that time, the port said: "On September 30th of 2000, Carnival Cruise Lines' vessel the *MS Celebration* made her inaugural voyage from Galveston Island. After 15 years of cultivating cruising from Texas, the Port Of Galveston is grateful for the 2,643 ship calls, 18 cruise ships, and the more than seven-million cruise passengers that have traveled through the port."

As port director Mike Mierzwa recalls, before Carnival came to town Galveston had served as a seasonal homeport for Sun Line's vessel *Stella Solaris* for approximately three years in the mid 1990s. "The *Stella Solaris* would do about eight to 10 seasonal cruises and carry about 600 passengers," he says, adding, "Galveston had also served as a port-of-call for various cruise lines on a very sporadic basis."

Since then, the cruise business in Galveston has flourished, even while nearby Houston's new \$80-million cruise terminal has lost both its ships. As previously reported in *Cruise Travel*, two lines—Princess Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line—began sailing from Houston's Bayport Cruise Terminal in the 2013/2014 season. However, both those ships, the *Caribbean Princess* and *Norwegian Jade*, will be shifted to ports in

Florida after this spring—part of a domino effect that has occurred in North America as cruise lines are increasingly deploying their vessels to China and Australia.

On the other hand, Galveston continues to attract new vessels. Even though its cruise terminals are farther than Houston's from the airport, Galveston's cruise piers lie an hour closer to the open sea—making it more attractive to itinerary planners. And the local area provides an abundant source market of vacationers who might want to take a cruise: An estimated 13-million people live within a 300-mile radius of the port in a region that includes Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city, and up to 95 percent of all passengers who board a ship in Galveston drive to the pier—one of the highest percentages of any U.S. homeport.

Currently, Galveston ranks as the fourth-busiest cruise port in the U.S. and seventh in world's top 20 cruise homeports; according to Mierzwa. For 2016, the port is expecting more than 865,000 passengers—an increase of 15 percent over the previous year—on 238 cruises. Altogether, Galveston serves as homeport for four year-round ships—three from Carnival and one from Royal Caribbean International—plus a seasonal deployment of Disney Cruise Line's *Disney Wonder* beginning in November and continuing through early 2017.

Galveston will also be affected this year by the reshuffling of ships that can be seen in other cruise homeports throughout the

U.S. In March, the 2,974-passenger *Carnival Liberty* will replace the 2,758-pax *Carnival Triumph* (which is being repositioned to New Orleans), and come May the 3,690-pax *Carnival Breeze* will replace the 3,690-pax *Carnival Magic* (which is being repositioned to Florida's Port Canaveral). Representing RCI is the 3,634-pax *Liberty Of The Seas*, which began sailing from Galveston in November 2015 and gets a "Texas-sized makeover" in February when the vessel enters drydock. When she emerges a month later, the revitalized *Liberty Of The Seas* will offer 26 new panoramic staterooms featuring floor-to-ceiling glass walls, new Mexican and Italian alternative restaurants, a new collection of waterslides called the Perfect Storm, and RCI's new waterpark for kids called Splashaway Bay.

Passengers flying in to meet their ship in Galveston typically arrive through George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, a distance of 70 miles or approximately 80 minutes driving time (although the port authority recommends leaving extra time due to construction on Interstate 45). Taxi service is available for \$135 a carload from 24-Hour Airport Taxi in Houston (281-630-1137 or www.24hairporttaxi.com). For those driving their own car to the piers, the port promises that "all cruise passengers are guaranteed a parking space." Drive-to guests can secure a parking spot in advance by reserving their space online through the port authority's website (log on to www.portgalvestonparking.com/) and also save \$5 off the cost. Rates start at \$40 in advance for a four-day cruise or \$70 for a seven-day cruise with shuttle service available.

The cruise terminals are located adjacent to Galveston's historic downtown area, and many port-area hotels offer special packages for their cruise guests (log on to www.galveston.com/parkandcruise/ for details). "Staying overnight in Galveston before or after a cruise makes a lot of sense," says a spokesperson for the Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau. "You get a chance to visit the island's many attractions and beaches and take advantage of free parking and transportation to the port, all for the price of a one-night stay at many hotels. It's a great deal."

For more information on the Galveston cruise terminals, directions to the port, parking reservations, and ship schedules, log on to www.portofgalveston.com. For information on Galveston hotels and attractions, contact the Galveston Island Convention & Visitors Bureau at 866-505-4456 or log on to www.galveston.com. **[CT]**