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Cruise the Great Lakes Forecasts Record Growth in 2026

\$300 million economic impact expected from nearly 175,000 passenger visits

(GREEN BAY, WI) - Cruise the Great Lakes, the region's cruise marketing program, announced today its forecast for the 2026 cruising season at a press conference in Green Bay that featured remarks from Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers. The 2026 season continues the long-term growth of Great Lakes cruising, delivering more passengers, port visits, and record-breaking \$300 million (US) economic impact on large and small regional destinations.

Economic impact

The economic impact of cruising on the Great Lakes is expected to exceed \$300 million (US) in 2026, a 25% increase from 2025. More passengers, more port visits, higher shoreside spending, and a rising price premium for Great Lakes cruises are critical drivers of this growth. The ongoing expansion of Great Lakes cruising continues to bring significant economic benefits to both large and small port communities throughout the region.

Cruise Lines and Ships

A new cruise line will enter the Great Lakes market in 2026--American Cruise Lines will bring ships to U.S. ports in the region. The itinerary highlights the growing variety of travel options.

In total, seven cruise lines are scheduled to operate on the Great Lakes in 2026, including:

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| 1. Pearl Seas | 5. Viking |
| 2. Ponant | 6. Hapag-Lloyd |
| 3. St. Lawrence Cruise Lines | 7. American Cruise Lines |
| 4. Victory | |

These lines will operate 10 ships cruising the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River in 2026:

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| 1. Pearl Mist (Pearl Seas) | 6. Le Champlain (Ponant) |
| 2. Canadian Empress (St. Lawrence Cruise Lines) | 7. Hanseatic Inspiration (Hapag-Lloyd) |
| 3. Octantis (Viking) | 8. Victory 1 (Victory) |
| 4. Polaris (Viking) | 9. Victory 2 (Victory) |
| 5. Le Bellot (Ponant) | 10. American Patriot (American) |

Passenger visits

In 2026, Great Lakes cruises are projected to welcome over 23,000 individual passengers, a 5% increase from 2025. More than 800 port visits are planned, which is nearly 15% higher than last year. And the total number of cruise passenger visits across the region is estimated at nearly 175,000, up nearly 15% from 2025.

“Great Lakes cruising is vitally important to Wisconsin and the Great Lakes region. It’s a major economic driver and job creator for our port communities and the state,” **said Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers**. “I commend Cruise the Great Lakes for playing a key role in promoting the Great Lakes as a world-class destination.”

“Great Lakes cruising does more than delight passengers. It drives dollars to shorelines across the region,” **said Wisconsin Tourism Secretary and Cruise the Great Lakes Chair Anne Sayers**. “The expected growth means more travelers making lifelong memories, more passengers visiting businesses in port cities, and more economic impact in Wisconsin and across the Great Lakes region.”

“As we look to 2026, we’re excited to see continued growth in the Great Lakes cruise sector,” **said Sally Davis Berry, Tourism Director of Cruise the Great Lakes**. “We forecast this upcoming season to be even stronger than 2025, both in terms of passenger numbers, destinations visited, and economic impact, which underscores the appeal of cruising in the Great Lakes.”

“Being part of Cruise the Great Lakes is a tremendous opportunity for Green Bay,” **said Brad Toll, CEO of Discover Green Bay**. “Each ship that visits introduces travelers from around the world to our community while generating meaningful economic benefits for local businesses. We’re excited to continue building on this momentum in 2026 and to showcase all that Green Bay has to offer cruise passengers.”

2026 Season Statistics At a Glance

- Economic impact over \$300 million (us), an expected increase of nearly 25% from 2025.
- 10 cruise ships will operate on the Great Lakes in 2026.
- 148 itineraries (trips) are planned by the 7 cruise lines
- Over 23,000 passengers will cruise on the Great Lakes.
- Cruise ships will make more than 800 visits to Great Lakes ports, a 15% increase.
- Total cruise passenger traffic at ports will total over 175,000, up 15% from 2025.

Understanding the Data

Port Visits:

- This estimate is calculated by adding together all itineraries from the cruise lines, representing all stops by all ships.
- If there were two ships, and each visited four ports, that would be eight port visits.

Passenger Visits:

- This figure is calculated by taking passenger number and multiplying it by the port stops.
- If there are two ships, each with 100 passengers, and each ship makes four port stops, then there are 800 passenger visits.

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About Cruise the Great Lakes

www.cruisethegreatlakes.com

Cruise the Great Lakes is the region's cruise marketing program focused on attracting more passengers. It is a forum to bring together the States, Provinces, cruise lines, ports, convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, associations, and others to work toward shared goals.