Written evidence submitted by the

Cruise Lines International Association

Introductory summary

1. Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the new inquiry from the Culture, Media and Sport Committee to examine the future of the UK's tourism industry.
2. CLIA is the preeminent cruise trade association, providing a unified voice for the industry and its members as the leading authority of the global cruise community. CLIA represents a diverse cruise industry, including cruise lines, ports, destinations, shipyards, and travel professionals. As the leading trade association, CLIA advocates for safe, sustainable cruise operations, supports tourism strategies that benefit communities, and promotes innovation toward net-zero emissions by 2050.
3. The UK Government publication, Cruise Growth Plan (September 2025), stated "the cruise industry is a vital part of the UK's maritime and tourism ecosystem". The UK is a significant cruise market, with more than 50 ports in all four nations, welcoming cruise guests from around the world. The UK is the world's third-largest source market for cruise passengers, with holidaymakers from the UK and Ireland took taking 2.54 million ocean cruises last year, surpassing the previous highest total of 2.4 million in 2024. The UK is also home to major functions of international cruise lines as well as distinctive British cruise brands, bringing both economic and employment opportunities.
4. The latest data from Oxford Economics research commissioned by CLIA stated that the UK cruise industry supported 69,000 jobs across the country and contributed £6.3 billion to the UK economy, including direct, indirect and induced output. To maintain and further grow the significant benefits that arise from inbound, outbound, and domestic cruise tourism, the UK must offer a commercially competitive operating environment to continue to attract an internationally operating industry.
5. CLIA values its working relationship with the Department for Culture Media Sport (DCMS), including its seat on the Visitor Economy Advisory Council (VEAC). CLIA looks forward to continuing collaboration with the UK Government to meet its ambition to increase overseas visitor numbers from 42.5 million to 50 million by 2030, and a shared vision for a UK cruise sector that enjoys sustained growth, benefiting the UK economy and coastal communities.

Questions

1) How effective are government policies in supporting the growth, competitiveness and long-term resilience of the tourism sector?

6. To date, UK government policies have been effective on immediate recovery and impact, such as, The Tourism Recovery Plan (2021) and prior COVID support. However, in recent years, there has been a lack of tourism strategy, with cruise often not being included within tourism related policies despite the considerable contributions of cruise to the UK's visitor economy. Under the current government, we are awaiting new policies and long-term strategic planning and investment in tourism to meet the Government's aims of economic growth through tourism and increasing inbound tourism.
7. The UK government established the VEAC in 2025, to bring industry and government together to create a new national visitor economy strategy. The upcoming Visitor Economy Growth Strategy is yet to be published, but it will be an opportunity to pave the way for long-term investment and growth of the tourism sector. The role of cruise tourism within the wider visitor economy must be firmly situated within the strategy, as well how cruise can continue to be a great asset to UK tourism, including in relation to regional and coastal tourism, an extended season for these areas, and helping to introduce the UK's regions and islands to tourists who are likely to return. The strategy must be accompanied by coordinated action, targeted support, and an enabling policy framework.
8. Additionally, government policy should focus on an integrated approach to tourism across regions and nations, due to the devolved nature of tourism, whilst balancing the need for sustainable and responsible tourism with competitiveness. Policy should also ensure proper governance of tourism plans at local and regional levels and address sectoral skills and labour challenges. It should also integrate tourism needs with wider government priorities such as energy needs (for example, port electrification), and infrastructure investment, so that ports can efficiently embark and debark guests. Government should also safeguard and strengthen the UK's reputation as an accessible and well-connected destination between ports and local towns so that they can be reached by guests and crew.

i. What are the main barriers to international competitiveness? How effectively does the UK promote itself overseas as a destination and what more could be done to strengthen its international profile?

9. VisitBritain's campaigns such as "Starring GREAT Britain" are welcomed, but funding cuts have reduced its impact. However, CLIA has welcomed the Government's commitment in the Cruise Growth Plan to include cruise destinations and experiences in future campaigns.

10. Likewise, CLIA has welcomed the establishment of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs), though more support and investment are needed for them to make any significant impact. Their long term funding is also uncertain which risks their viability.
11. On top of this, the UK government continues to introduce and propose policies that do not support the growth, competitiveness and long-term resilience of the tourism sector. Rising air passenger duty (APD) and recent proposals for visitor levies are all examples of policies that go against the government's target to increase annual international visitors to 50 million by 2030.
12. Similarly, the UK's competitiveness in the international cruise sector has also been weakened through government policies compounding costs for cruise lines and guests. This includes the rising costs of Electronic Travel Authorisation, the expansion of the UK Emission Trading Scheme to maritime without phasing it in or sufficient support for maritime decarbonisation, and the lack of investment in port infrastructure such as Onshore Power Supply, in contrast to competitors in the EU. Collectively, this risks reducing the ability of ports to attract cruise calls and the tourism benefit that comes from these.
13. Cruise relies on the right policy conditions to support growth including streamlined planning for investment in infrastructure and transportation, high quality port and tourism facilities, low energy costs, avoidance of duplicative costs, and consistency with international frameworks and standards. While the UK remains an attractive destination, there is increasing international competition and sustained investment is critical to ensuring the UK can accommodate future growth and remain competitive with other global cruise market. Cruise ships are moveable assets that may be deterred to call to a region if it does not have a stable and competitive operating environment.
14. For cruise guests, itineraries which visit the UK are often marketed as 'British Isles cruises', with cruise ships calling to all four nations of the UK. CLIA continues to advocate for greater alignment and collaboration among the nations of England, Scotland, Wales, to promote the regions and destinations outside of London and encourage new international visitors overall. A more joint up approach would help to make UK itineraries more attractive to international cruise lines.

ii. How does the UK's recent tourism performance (including visitor numbers, length of stay and visitor spend) compare with other major European tourism destinations?

15. With the UK's proximity to Europe, the government must consider carefully the potential impact of policies placing the UK at a competitive disadvantage comparatively.
16. Cruise line itineraries are not fixed, and itinerary planners consider a range of factors when selecting a destination call. If a ship call to a destination becomes too costly or requirements become burdensome, cruise lines may choose to reduce their calls in a destination or to skip the destination entirely. Additionally, as itineraries are planned at least two years in advance, clarity and consistency is key for building a reputation of the UK being a competitive and attractive cruise destination.

v. What are the arguments for and against the proposal to give mayoral strategic authorities the power to introduce an overnight visitor levy? If a levy is introduced, how should it best be spent to attract tourism and investment?

17. The proposal to give mayoral strategic authorities the power to introduce an overnight visitor levy directly goes against the UK government's mission to rise international visitor numbers and risks the UK's competitiveness as a tourism destination. Visitors may be disincentivised to travel to the UK, particularly in the current climate of rising costs and increased taxation, as well as additional costly visa requirements, such as the ETA.
18. If a levy is introduced, all revenues must be ringfenced to be reinvested locally into tourism related infrastructure only.

2) How effectively do government structures and working arrangements support the tourism sector?

19. The VEAC is a valued government-industry forum to facilitate direct engagement with a diverse set of stakeholders across the tourism sector. The VEAC should continue following the publication of the Visitor Economy Growth Strategy to govern the delivery and keep all stakeholders accountable. It is important that it continues to include representatives from all segments of the tourism sector. It should also be administered so that meetings are more regular, and so that there are more opportunities for industry members to provide feedback and learnings to government.
20. With wider policies that impact tourism in the UK, DCMS must work closely across government to communicate any impact that may directly go against growth of the UK tourism sector. This includes with DfT, DBT, the Home Office,

DfE and DESNZ in relation to cruise tourism, the infrastructure needed for it and the skills of the future to keep the UK competitive.

i. How well do VisitBritain/VisitEngland and Destination Management Organisations support the sector? How well do they compare to equivalent bodies in other countries?

21. CLIA is pleased to have started working much more closely with VisitBritain and VisitEngland, and LVEPs, including through hosting a webinar and an in person workshop at our recent UK Cruise Tourism Summit. However, funding cuts and uncertainty about long term LVEP funding reduces their ability to reach their potential.

ii. How effectively do the UK and devolved Governments work together to promote tourism and support the sector?

22. With tourism policy being a devolved matter across the UK, this can lead to fragmented strategies and policy inconsistencies. There is an opportunity for best practice to be shared between Governments, success stories to be spread and a UK-wide, comprehensive cruise tourism plan to be created.
23. CLIA was pleased in the Cruise Growth Plan that DCMS committed to ensure that the UK cruise industry is appropriately considered in relevant tourism dialogues, initiatives, and strategies led by the UK Government - including but not limited to the VEAC, Devolved Governments, and Crown Dependencies.
24. The Plan also committed DCMS to work with VisitBritain and Devolved Governments to ensure its international marketing campaigns highlight the UK's cruise destinations and experiences, showcasing the sector's contribution to the visitor economy and its appeal to all travellers.
25. As part of the Plan's delivery, CLIA recently hosted representatives from the Devolved Administrations and the UK Government for a roundtable focused on them working together in relation to cruise tourism policy. We look forward to continuing these conversations.

3) What opportunities exist to increase inward investment into tourism infrastructure and what changes may be needed to encourage it?

i. Which areas have seen the biggest growth in inbound tourism and why?

26. In recent years we have seen a rise in inbound cruise tourism to the UK, with this being evident by there being a longer cruise season, with many transit ports welcoming ships from March/April up until October. There has also been growth in the number of smaller ships visiting UK ports, due to general market trends.
27. Additionally, there has been significant investment into port infrastructure in the UK specifically designed to grow cruise tourism. For example, Stornoway port invested £49 million to build a deep-water berth to welcome larger cruise ships, the largest capital investment in the island's history. Additionally, the Port of Aberdeen opened an entirely new £420 million South Harbour, which can now welcome multiple large cruise ships at the same time. In both these cases, the number of cruise calls tripled in their aftermath, with both welcoming 60-75 ships this year. Other ports such as Portsmouth and Southampton have invested in Onshore Power Supply, in a bid to serve the future needs of the cruise industry.
28. This investment is often led by the private sector, and coordination with Government would be welcomed, including for Government planning and energy network policy to promote port infrastructure and grid connection for the purpose of cruise tourism.

ii. How can investment be unlocked in all parts of the country?

29. The Government should focus on having policies that support ports that wish to invest in infrastructure that can support their cruise benefits. Whether this is in relation to planning, energy needs, or attracting investment, these are all key to helping to build and future proof local areas inbound cruise tourism. The Government's Cruise Growth Plan made reference to this, including through commitments to engage with global partners to explore opportunities for investment and development, and to explore opportunities for UK ports through planning reform.

4) How can tourism better support regional growth, community prosperity and wider Government objectives?

30. Cruise tourism benefits coastal and remote regions and islands that may be harder to reach by other means, supporting local services such as tourist attractions, restaurants, tour operators, shops, taxi and bus drivers, and hotels. This spending is not restricted to the duration of the cruise, as CLIA research shows that the people stay in hotels both at the start and end of their cruise holiday. According to CLIA, on average, each cruise passenger spends an

average of £100 a day in a destination. These benefits can be felt up to 90 minutes away from the port, without burdening city infrastructure and services.

31. Cruise passengers also do not take up the often-limited bed stock in the destination visited, enabling local destinations and businesses to benefit from their day spend without impacting local accommodation and associated services.
32. Oxford Economic research shows that the sector supports 69,000 jobs across the country and contributed £6.3 billion to the UK economy, including direct, indirect and induced output. Regionally, cruise has a major impact on a local area. According to data from WPI Economics, a single cruise turnaround by Carnival UK in Southampton can contribute up to £2.5 million to the UK economy.
33. There is an extensive supply chain across the country providing a vast array of products and services, encompassing interior design, catering, port services, ground handling, logistics, ship retrofit and repair, engineering, new build, and net zero technology support to name a few. These directly benefit from the UK's leading role in cruise tourism.
34. In addition, the UK has a thriving travel agency community, which benefits from the UK's position as the world's third-largest source market for cruise. CLIA works with more than 10,000 travel agents across the country whose livelihoods rely on cruise.
35. The cruise industry offers fulfilling and rewarding careers at sea and landside, with a huge diversity of professional opportunities available. The cruise industry also offers multiple careers that mirror opportunities available in land tourism and hospitality services, creating transferable career pathways. Guest services entertainment, shore excursion planning, sales, and hospitality management are just a few of the many roles available.
36. Ongoing Government support for cadet training programmes is essential to maintaining the UK's global leadership in maritime skills, delivering strong economic returns and supporting long-term workforce development.

iii. What are the particular opportunities and challenges for tourism in: a) coastal areas, and b) rural areas

37. The geographical spread of cruise ports allows cruise tourism to support coastal and rural areas.
38. As cruise is one of the most managed forms of tourism, this allows for long term collaboration from operators, ports and local communities to provide added stability to the businesses and local economies in coastal communities around the country, including in many remote regions, that rely on cruise and to deal with any local challenges head on.

39. Cruise also plays an important role in driving repeat visitation to these areas which are difficult to reach by other forms of transport. According to CLIA, those who visit a location by cruise are also likely to return on a later holiday, with over 60% of guests returning to a destination that they visited on a cruise.
40. In some destinations, there can be challenges around local infrastructure such as public transport connectivity or availability of foreign language tour guides, and tourism infrastructure costs remain high. A strengthened approach to tourism planning and joined up thinking towards connectivity outside the port gates into towns/cities is key to ameliorating pressure points and to supporting ports to become better gateways to the region.

5) What are the key issues facing the tourism workforce?

i. How have immigration and employment policies and legislation affected the tourism sector?

41. Many international cruise operators have chosen to invest in the UK and locate their ship management entities here and therefore qualify for the UK's Tonnage Tax regime. These operators, per the requirements of the regime, have key operational and technical departments in the UK such as marine operations, engine operations, safety, security, medical, environment, itinerary planning and ship building.
42. However, the growth of these ship management operations is at risk because UK immigration rule changes have made it harder to attract people to hire and relocate from other countries to the UK.
43. The profile of these highly skilled professionals are not always recognised under immigration rules. For example, a Skilled Worker must have a job offer in an eligible skilled occupation from a Home Office-approved sponsor, meet specific education requirements to graduate-level or above. The system's process is also administratively demanding, uncertain, and increasingly costly to companies.
44. This, coupled with rising inflation in the UK, has made the cost of sponsoring this caliber of talent, on the salaries they require to make the move from onboard to shoreside, is a cost which companies are finding difficult to justify.
45. Further to this, dependents (partners and children) are no longer allowed to accompany the applicant under the Skilled Worker visa route which makes it difficult to attract people with families to the UK.
46. Unfortunately, companies may be left with no other choice but to move certain roles away from the UK if it cannot offer a commercially viable and competitive environment for growth of their workforce. These considerations are already

becoming a reality, with some companies establishing a second base in Europe consequently.