

## LOCAL, STATE &amp; REGION

# River cruises to return to Astoria

*Differing state guidelines lead to alternate stops than in summers past*

BY EDWARD STRATTON  
The Astorian

American Queen Steamboat Co. and American Cruise Lines have been sailing the southeastern U.S. for the past month under guidelines approved by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention during the coronavirus pandemic.

While oceangoing cruises are on hold until at least fall, trips on the Columbia and Snake rivers will likely restart in early May after coordination with state officials and ports between Astoria and Lewiston, Idaho.

Clatsop County Manager Don Bohn described the situation as fluid but said local officials have been told the American Song, one of four regional American Cruise Lines ships, will stop at the 17th Street Dock in Astoria the first week of May with fewer than 40 passengers.

"I've heard that the first ships will be at about 50% capacity," Bohn said. "But I also know that if things go well, they might notch that up. But even at the maximum, they were going to be running with about 25% vacancy."

A spokesperson for American Queen Steamboat said the company hopes to begin cruises on its sternwheeler, the American Empress, later in the spring. A reservation specialist with the company said cruises on the Columbia won't begin until June and are



River cruise ships docked at North Tongue Point over the winter.

Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

already fully booked into November.

Overnight river cruises were shut down more than a year ago because of the pandemic. But a conditional sailing order from the CDC has allowed ships to carry up to 250 combined passengers and crew.

American Cruise Lines and American Queen Steamboat launched the 2021 season in mid-March with coastal voyages between South Carolina and Florida and along the Mississippi River between Memphis and New Orleans. The companies instituted enhanced safety measures, such as decreased capacity, mask requirements, testing of pas-

sengers and additional medical personnel.

American Cruise Lines homeported its regional vessels at the North Tongue Point shipyards on the eastern edge of Astoria, where local shipwrights from WCT Marine & Construction have provided maintenance.

Oregon has allowed river cruises to operate, provided they follow CDC guidelines on the water and county-by-county virus guidelines when docked. Bohn and Astoria Mayor Bruce Jones said they worry more about the masses of tourists coming by car than smaller, partially empty cruise ships carrying older passen-

gers more likely to be vaccinated and following enhanced health protocols.

"If they do follow all the state guidelines, there's not really a basis on which to prohibit other operations, especially in the context of the level of tourism that's already taking place in Astoria," Jones said. "Most of the hotels on the coast are full or nearly full."

#### Washington state on hold

Cruises on the Columbia and Snake rivers include stops upriver in Washington state, where Gov. Jay Inslee has banned all cruise ship dockings until at least May 15, after which conditions will be re-

evaluated.

American Cruise Lines often docks at the Port of Skamania in Stevenson, Washington. Pat Albaugh, the port's executive director, said 130 dockings have been canceled over the past year, costing the agency much of its dockside revenue and preventing some seasonal hires.

Instead of Stevenson, the American Song is expected to dock in early May at the Port of Cascade Locks. Olga Kaganova, the general manager of the port, said the community welcomes the additional tourism revenue. But she doesn't see the logic of allowing cruise ships on one side of the narrow Columbia channel but not less than 2 miles away in Stevenson.

American Cruise Lines cruises usually head upriver to Richland, Washington, before leaving the Columbia for the Snake and ending the trip in Clarkston, Washington. Wanda Keefer, the port manager in Clarkston, said American Cruise Lines is instead negotiating to stop next door in Lewiston, Idaho.

Keefer said local officials have tried to relay to the states how much safer the river cruises are than tourists coming in by car.

"I'm personally confident that those managing the cruise lines have done it thoughtfully with a great deal of intention to the safety of their passengers," she said. "And they've been consultative with the communities along the way. The cruising has reopened on the Mississippi River. We're not hearing anything about it because it's successful. So I expect that we will have a good season."

## Feds arrest Hillsboro man in siege of the U.S. Capitol

BY MAXINE BERNSTEIN  
The Oregonian

Federal agents Sunday arrested a 62-year-old Hillsboro man in connection with the Jan. 6 takeover of the U.S. Capitol.

Reed Knox Christensen is accused of assaulting a federal law enforcement officer during the U.S. Capitol siege, federal prosecutor Paul Maloney told a magistrate judge.

An FBI video on the U.S. Department of Justice website shows him pushing past a barrier in front of the U.S. Capitol and grappling with several officers, according to a federal complaint.

Christensen made his first appearance in federal court in Portland on Monday, becoming the third person arrested in Oregon whom federal prosecutors have tied to the U.S. Capitol insurrection. Another man was arrested in Vancouver, Washington, last month.

"I was picked up in my suit on my way to church," he told U.S. Magistrate Judge Youlee Yim You.

He's also accused of engaging in an act of physical violence in a Capitol building and entering or remaining on restricted grounds without lawful authority, among other charges.

Maloney asked that firearms that were found at his home be removed before Christensen could be released from custody, pending trial.

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