

What began as a modest initiative to increase vessels calls at Cochin, way back in the year 2001, when a new paradigm was defined in providing personalized services to the hithertofore innocuous visits of cruise ship, has today become the mainstay of cruise tourism in India. Today, Cochin has set benchmarks in providing highly professional service to cruise calls for other ports in India to follow.

The efforts which included a dedicated Cruise Cell and Single Window Clearance comprising of officials of the Port, Customs, Immigration and CISF on one hand and the Tourism Ministry, Tour Operators, Vessel Agent, Stevedores providing labour pool and the taxi and autorickshaws drivers, on the other, has led to Cochin being the most preferred cruise destination in India.

To cap it all, the seamless integration of all the government agencies has been singularly responsible for facilitating novel cruise tourism such as Fly-Cruise-Fly, turnaround operation as well as home porting of cruise vessels at Cochin.

The Port is in festive mood again, what with hosting nearly 5000 guests (3328 guests and 1615 crew) on board German Cruise Liner AIDA diva, which is the port since 25<sup>th</sup> November 2012 on its third visit to Cochin. This is perhaps the highest single aggregation of foreign tourists at any destination within a short span of three days.

Till date, Cochin Port has hosted six turnarounds of three cruise ships of the AIDA Cruises involving a minimum of 2500 tourists in each call. The first turnaround was for AIDA cara in October 2009 and this was followed by two for AIDA aura (October 2010 and April 2011) and three turnaround operation for AIDA diva (November 2011, March 2012 and November 2012).

This year Cochin Port hosted AIDA diva at the newly build cruise facilitation centre, built with the financial support from the Union Tourism Ministry and Kerala Tourism Ministry. The facility which is set up in an 1600 sq.m area, is fully air-conditioned, with all modern amenities like, duty free shop, cafeteria/souvenir shops, Customs and immigration clearance facilities under one roof, X-ray scanning machines for baggages of embarking and disembarking passengers etc.

The representatives of the Management of AIDA Cruises and the Crew were highly delighted to use the cruise facilitation centre and were highly appreciative of the facilities made available to them. In fact, the cruise facilitation centre has helped them to significantly bring down the turnaround cost as compared to their previous turnaround operations, when they had to set up temporary shamians/tents.

A total of 1466 disembarkations were smoothly handled on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012. When the last count was taken on 27<sup>th</sup> November, a total of 1862 tourists had embarked for the fresh sojourn beginning on 28<sup>th</sup> November. A few more tourists are expected to join later in the day.

The vessel berthed at BTP jetty on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2012. After the completion of the sightseeing on the same day, the passengers started disembarking on the early hours. The passenger disembarked in batches of 150-200 until the early hours of 26<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

This was followed by the re-arrangement of the facilities within the cruise terminal to facilitate the embarkation process which involved, 14 travel desks from the ship side, 10 Immigration

Counters and five Customs Counters followed by CISF counter, three frisking booths. The Port put into service the brand new X-ray scanning machine which facilitated in scanning of over 4000 baggage of the disembarking and embarking tourists. With the addition of one more X-ray scanner in the Cruise Terminal there would be three baggage scanners, including the existing scanning machine provided by the Customs. The final count of embarking passenger is expected to be close to 1900 by the time ship sails on the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> November 2012 to Colombo.

A total of nine flights were involved in the disembarkation process and seven for the embarkation process. The tourists were taken around in the city in 81 luxury coaches, including five low-floor Volvo bus hired from the KSRTC. A total of 72 taxis and 127 autorickshaws were also hired by the tourists during this turnaround process; not to speak of the amount spent by the tourists at the places of tourist importance in the city and the tips given. 59 labours got employment for the portorage of the passenger baggage besides several other workers and associates of the travel agents, vessel agents, tour operators, guides and other service providers.

The success of this turnaround operation can be largely attributed to the zeal, dedication and excellent team work of the Customs, Immigration and CISF who worked in clock like precision with the Port officials. AIDA Diva will leave for Colombo at 8 am tomorrow(28 nov 2012) and will call at Cochin again in March 2013 for next turn around.

The cruise vessel calls at Cochin Port during the last five years is as below :

