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Cruise Passenger Travel Grows 13.6 Percent

Reflecting a rise in the popularity of passengers departing from ports closer to their homes, cruise lines carried 2.3 million passengers on North American cruises in the first quarter of 2004, the Maritime Administration (MARAD) reported today. The figures reflect a 13.6 percent increase compared to the same period in 2003.

The majority of cruises are still destined for the Caribbean and the Bahamas. However, there has been important growth in new and emerging "drive market" ports -- departure ports closer to home. For example, last year, during the first quarter, four ports -- New York, Jacksonville, Houston, and Norfolk -- offered no departures. Now, these cities are currently among the top 15 departure ports in the nation. Other ports posting impressive gains are Charleston with 54 percent, New Orleans with 46 percent, Galveston with 31 percent, and San Diego with a nearly 200 percent increase.

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta, commenting on the figures, said, "Cruise lines have continued investing in new cruise ships and with the economic recovery, Americans are taking advantage of expanded cruise offerings that depart closer to home."

While Miami remained the number one departure port in the first quarter of 2004, its passenger traffic declined 15 percent from last year, and its market share fell from 30 to 22 percent, in part, because more departure traffic is going through other ports. Los Angeles overtook Tampa for the Number 5 ranking.

According to the International Council of Cruise Lines' most recent economic impact study, the North American Cruise Industry contributed a total economic benefit to the U.S. economy of \$20.4 billion in 2002. Direct spending of the cruise lines and passengers on U.S. goods and services was \$12 billion and those expenditures generated nearly 280,000 jobs in the U.S. economy.

Maritime Administrator Captain William G. Schubert noted the good news for the nation's economy, saying, "The growth in the number of departure ports provides cruise passengers with more choices and ensures that this industry's economic benefits are felt more widely throughout the country."

The figures on cruise passenger travel are part of a statistical series issued quarterly by MARAD on U.S. cruise passenger traffic, with data for 17 cruise lines serving the United States. Inquiries regarding the data should be made to the U.S. Maritime Administration, Office of Statistical & Economic Analysis, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Room 8107, Washington, DC, 20590. Telephone: (202) 366-2267, Fax: (202) 366-8886, E-mail: data.marad@marad.dot.gov.