



## **Economic Impact of the Mississippi River Cruise Industry City of Natchez, Mississippi**

This report will focus on two (2) steamboat companies that currently dock at Natchez and should be used as a general overview. The two companies are the American Cruise Line Company and American Queen Steamboat Company. Both of these companies manage vessels that are capable of landing at a boat ramp, the boats have a “gangplank” that spans from the boat to the shore, so that passengers may disembark the ship.

### **American Cruise Line**

The American Cruise Line (ACL) currently has four (4) vessels; they are the America, Queen of the Mississippi, Harmony, and the Song. Since 2017, at least one and often two of these vessels have docked in Natchez approximately forty-six (46) weeks a year. The docking schedule may vary due to weather or river conditions, but usually the vessels are here on Monday (or Tuesday) every week except during the middle of our hot, humid summertime and at Christmas.

The ACL vessels have an average capacity of 195 passengers. During high season, October through May, the vessels are usually close to full capacity. During colder and warmer months, the vessels are usually just over half-capacity. ACL vessels historically dock at Natchez around 8:00 AM, having come from either Vicksburg to the north or St. Francisville from the south. The vessels will remain in Natchez for the entire day, customarily leaving around 4:30 pm.

While the ACL vessels boats are in Natchez, their passenger have a choice of activities which include touring of our many historic home, tour of Frogmore Plantation, utilizing the Hop-On, Hop Off Shuttle, playing a round of golf, enjoying a beer at The Natchez Brewery, or strolling through our historic downtown.

ACL shuttle busses follow the vessels by inland route and are waiting to pick up passengers and take them to various stops in downtown Natchez. The ACL shuttle runs from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., with the normal stops being the antebellum home Rosalie, Natchez Visitor Center, William Johnson House Museum, Magnolia Hall, Stanton Hall, Franklin Street, St. Mary Minor Basilica, Eola Hotel Corner, and the Natchez Bluff Gazebo. Usually about half of the passengers choose to take the shuttle and plan their own day in Natchez with shopping, dining and sightseeing. The shuttle is free to all passengers. Depending on the number of passengers, ACL will bring two, sometimes three shuttle buses to transport passengers around Natchez.

Premium tours packages, sold by Natchez Pilgrimage Tours, are historically purchased by half of the passengers. Premium tours in Natchez Longwood Mansion and Frogmore Plantation, two separate tours, scheduled for 10:00 A.M. or 1:00 P.M. ACL busses provide the transportation to the sites. Longwood tickets are discounted from the regular price of \$25.00 to the group rate of \$12.50. Frogmore Plantation tickets are priced separately. The passengers that take the premium tour often take the shuttle to downtown Natchez either before or after they leave on the premium tour.

### **Economic Impact of American Cruise Line**

For forty-six (46) weeks of the year, ACL brings from 100 to 195 visitors onto the streets of downtown Natchez for a period of seven hours. These visitors are free to choose their own activities, which usually includes shopping, dining, walking, or a self-guided tour.

During this time as well, the ACL disembarks to eat in our restaurants, visit the grocery store, shop downtown or at the Natchez Mall, or visit several area drugstores for sundry items.

While moored at Natchez, ACL bus drivers follow the boats via inland route, come in the night before and spend the night at our hotels, all the while eating in our restaurants, buying groceries, and filling their buses up with gasoline. And recall, ACL will bring two to three buses during each docking at Natchez.

In addition, during these 46 weeks the tour guides at our many antebellum homes earn extra income, from wages and tips, by guiding the premium bus tours to Longwood and Frogmore Plantation. Normally 4 to 6 guides will be employed and paid a daily rate. In addition, an additional number of home guides are employed during this time period as well. These additional jobs total approximately 25.

Also while docked, food wholesalers including Sysco, Merchant's Foods and Hicks Chicks deliver food and other needed supplies onto the vessels. Additionally, several local taxi cab companies including Brown Transportation and Downtown Karla Brown shuttle passengers and crew around as well, to regional airports, the local hospitals doctor's offices, drugstores, mall, and historic sites outside of ACL's shuttles route.

### **American Queen Steamboat Company**

The American Queen Steamboat Company (AQSC) currently has two vessels that dock in Natchez, including the American Queen and the Duchess. Since 2017 both vessels have historically docked at Natchez on a Thursday for approximately forty-six (46) weeks of the year. The docking schedule of the AQSC vessels may vary due to weather or river conditions, occasionally including a Friday docking. In addition, AQSC is expected to add a third vessel, The Countess, which slated to dock in Natchez beginning May 2020 (or when vessel dockings resume after the Covid-19 Pandemic).

The American Queen has a passenger capacity of 420, the Duchess 195, and the Countess 195 as well. During their busy season, which is October through May, the vessels are normally close to capacity. As with the American Cruise Line vessels, colder (and warmer) months reduces the number of passengers to again just over fifty percent (50%) capacity. AQSC vessels historically dock at Natchez around 8:00 A.M., having previously left Vicksburg to the North or St. Francisville to the South. The vessels also will remain in Natchez for a full day, normally departing around 5:00 P.M.

### **Economic Impact of the American Queen Steamboat Company**

Passenger have a choice of activities that include guided tours of our many historic mansions, touring Frogmore Plantation, guided shuttle tour, or the company's guided premium tour that includes visits to The Towers, Longwood, Frogmore Plantation, and The Tavern. Passengers may also chose to do as they choose while docked at Natchez.

AQSC shuttle busses also follow the vessels by inland route, waiting to pick up passengers and take them to various stops in our historic downtown. Their shuttle buses run from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., and the stops normally include Rosalie, Natchez Visitor's Center, Old South Trading Company, William Johnson House Museum, Magnolia Hall, Stanton Hall, Franklin Street, St. Mary Minor Basilica, NAPAC Museum, and the Natchez Bluff Gazebo. Historically one-half of the passengers choose to take the shuttle and plan

their own day in Natchez, dining, shopping and sightseeing. The AQSC shuttles are free to all passengers. As with the American Cruise Line employees, AQSC employ step-on guides to ride on the shuttles to give commentary on local attractions. Each vessel brings three to four shuttle busses to scurry their passengers around our historic city.

Premium guided tours are historically purchased by half of the passengers. Premium tours include stops at Longwood and Frogmore Plantation, again with the ticket price of Longwood reduced \$12.50 (from \$25.00) due to it being a group tour. And the ticket price to tour Frogmore Plantation is charged at the gate. Other premium tours include The Towers and the Tavern.

For forty-six weeks of the year, American Queen Steamboat Company brings from 400 to 600 visitors onto the streets of downtown Natchez. These visitors are free to choose their activities, which normally includes sightseeing, shopping and dining. Additionally, the crew also disembarks while docked to eat, buy groceries, shop, visit area doctors, buy sundry items, etc.

As with the American Cruise Line, the AQSC bus drivers follow the vessels via inland route, arrive in Natchez the night before, sleep at a local hotel, dine out, fill up their buses with gasoline, and buy needed supplies. AQSC historically provides five (5) busses to follow their vessels along their routes, so at times they have up to ten buses in down on a given Wednesday night.

Also during this time, local tour guides earn additional income by guiding the premium bus tours to Longwood and Frogmore Plantation, and guiding the downtown shuttles. Normally 10 to 12 tour guides will be employed and paid a daily rate. In addition, food wholesalers including Sysco, Merchant's Foods and Hicks Chicks among others, deliver supplies to be loaded onto vessels while docked at Natchez.

Local taxi cab companies including Brown Transportation and Downtown Karla Brown shuttle passengers and crew to airports, hospitals, doctor's offices, drugstores and to other historic sites outside of the shuttle buses normal route.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the positive economic impact of the Mississippi river cruise industry in Natchez is evident, supporting several hundred tourism jobs and providing a tremendous economic benefit to Natchez-Adams County, Miss-Lou and southwest Mississippi to the tune of several million dollars annually. All of our downtown merchants, restaurants, and historic attractions have the opportunity to benefit from the dockings of the two (2) American Queen Steamboat Company and four (4) American Cruise Line vessels! In addition, the sales taxes generated from the river cruise industry helps the City of Natchez conduct its day-to-day operations, including providing fire and police protection, paving our streets, repairing our aging infrastructure, and providing a multitude of other services to our residents.

In addition, the visual impact of the Riverboats coming and going on the river at Natchez is priceless.

*This report was prepared by Eugenie Cates, Vice President of Natchez Pilgrimage Tours, Natchez Receptive Tours Operator since 1993.*