



How BIG is TOO BIG?

Big ship. Big Effort?

That's what some people want to know. How far will I have to walk to dinner? How long will it take to tender? Embark? Disembark? Do I really want to be on a ship with thousands of other passengers?

Like everything else in life, some say yes, some say no and some say maybe. What is sure, however, is that the industry will continue to build larger ships. "There are no basic technical constraints to further size increases," says Maurizio Cergol, cruise vessel chief designer for Fincantieri, an Italian shipyard. Acknowledging the "build it and the will come" attitude among cruise lines, Cergol says the tendency toward building larger ships is primarily to gain economies of scale.

"As the size of the ship increases, you reduce the costs of berths (on a per-berth basis) to gain economies of scale," he says. But he warns, "If you go too far, you get diseconomies" including port limitations and docking issues as well as restrictions as to where the large ships can operate.

Royal Caribbean International's 5,400 passenger Project Genesis (6,400 when triples and quads are fully occupied) will likely have to tender passengers ashore in most ports. Even so, the new megaships actually could relieve some pressure on ports, because they will feature activities to keep passengers on board in ports.

Are there ships on the horizon larger than Project Genesis? "I don't think the end is in sight as long as people have vision - and ego," quips Carnival Cruise Lines' President and CEO Bob Dickinson.

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