

ROYAL CARIBBEAN MAKES 5-YEAR COMMITMENT

Royal Caribbean International (RCI) has signed an agreement with the Port of Galveston to operate the *Rhapsody of the Seas* from Galveston Island for five years beginning in April 2002.

“Galveston has reached a height that many knew would eventually happen with the decision by RCI to sail from Galveston Island for five years beginning in 2002,” stated Katherine D. Moore, Galveston Port Director. “The Port of Galveston and the Galveston business community made a major commitment in 1999 to attract the first major line to begin calling at The Texas Cruise Ship Terminal on Galveston Island. The Board of Trustees knew that it would be a good business decision and the return of that investment has now been realized. By August 2002, Galveston will be home port to four cruises weekly.”

Initially, RCI selected to sail from Galveston from October through December 2001 on a rotation with two other Gulf of Mexico ports.

In July 2001 RCI announced it would sail from Galveston for a second season beginning December 8, 2002 through March 16, 2003 on 17 sailings.

By October of this RCI reevaluated their Galveston operation and decided to sail from Galveston for the five years beginning on April 14, 2001. The Board of Trustees of the Galveston Wharves signed the long-term agreement in November 2001.

After coming out of drydock in 2002, the *Rhapsody of the Seas* will arrive in Galveston to load passengers for the first sailing of the five-year contract. The itinerary includes Cozumel, Mexico; Georgetown, the capital of the Cayman Islands; and Key West, Florida.

Six months into the itinerary, RCI plans to change the schedule to include Belize City. The rotation will be Key West, Belize City, Cozumel and the return trip to Galveston Island.

“We are naturally pleased with Royal Caribbean’s decision to bring year-round cruises to Galveston,” stated Donald L. Schattel, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Port of Galveston. “The impact from cruising continues to grow and the entire community is feeling the results. The shopping district in the nearby Strand area to the local food, flower and alcohol businesses are all realizing the impact of bringing these additional new visitors to the city.”

The program is RCI’s first year-round cruise operation in Texas and in the Gulf of Mexico. The line plans to operate 52 cruises annually from Galveston, sailing each Sunday. Based on the size of the *Rhapsody*, the cruise line will bring approximately 104,000 new visitors to the city annually.

“Galveston has been able to take advantage of growth in this sector of cruise operations because this community initially stepped up to the plate to help the Port put together the type of incentive package needed to attract a major cruise line,” added Moore. “The Port marketing team intensified its cruise marketing efforts in 1999 aided by a Board-approved incentive package. Competition was fierce, but our years of marketing Galveston Island to the cruise industry and our impressive incentive package combined to establish Galveston as the Western Gulf of Mexico Cruise Port of Choice for the world’s two largest cruise lines. By 2003, more than 350,000 passengers will visit Galveston to take multi-night cruises.”