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## **in some port towns, it's residents vs. cruises: 'we're going to eradicate them'**

From Alaska to Maine to Virginia, residents are using their voices and the law to preserve their communities.

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By [Andrea Sachs](#)

YORKTOWN, Va. — For now, the waterfront is a picture of serenity.

On a recent fall morning in this historic Tidewater town, two men quietly fished on the pier. A scuba diver emerged from the York River like a slick seal. A couple walked their dogs by a young man dressed like a Founding Father, and they didn't even yap at his tricorn hat.

Bob Hodson, who lives a few blocks away from the water, was picturing a different scene. As he gazed at the still harbor, he imagined a large cruise ship at anchor and a flotilla of tenders disgorging thousands of day-trippers on the shore. The visitors would board coaches for the nearby Virginia battlefields and Colonial Williamsburg, essentially turning the 17th-century settlement of about 220 residents into a bus depot.

This was a future that he could not — would not — accept.

“The cruise ship industry is so powerful,” said Hodson, 65. “But we're going to eradicate them like any other invasive species.”

Hodson, a semiretired senior technical expert at NASA, is a modern-day David. His Goliath? A billion-dollar cruise ship industry equipped with lobbyists and lawyers. The cruise industry says it forges symbiotic relationships with communities and brings economic boon to ports, with some industry estimates claiming passengers spend about \$100 on average at each stop. But Hodson is not alone in his crusade to keep the floating behemoths out.

Around the world, from Venice to Juneau, Alaska, to Bar Harbor, Maine, residents are rising up against what they consider a scourge on their communities. They fear the vessels that they say pollute their air and water, drain the local economy and displace overwhelming crowds that diminish their quality of life. In Bar Harbor, for example,



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They are pushing for gambling bans or environmental regulations. They are prohibiting the cruise lines from using their public piers or security operations. As the public opinion of tourism has soured overseas in cities already besieged by foreign visitors, destinations such as Venice and Amsterdam are banning the vessels from their central districts.

The citizen groups say they face staggering odds, but complacency is not an option. They are fighting back with protests, voting blocs and, crucially, coordinated efforts across borders. The Global Cruise Activist Network, founded in 2020, is one such collective, with a stated mission to build “a big tent” coalition.

“If you can’t live in your own city,” said Ross Klein, a retired professor and cruise industry expert, “you either move or you fight.”

Yorktown amicably receives small ships from American Cruise Lines. Residents have grown accustomed to hearing the cruise director’s chirpy announcements ringing through the harbor and seeing a few hundred visitors milling around the Colonial-era sites. But a plan floated by Princess Cruises to send several ships to Yorktown this summer was a different beast.

Under a two-year pilot program, the vessels would deposit thousands of visitors on its dainty waterfront. A new pier by the Watermen’s Museum, the next phase of development, would serve as a cruise ship parking lot. The residents objected, and Princess retreated.

Carnival Corporation, which owns Princess, declined to comment on its plans in Yorktown; Princess did not respond to multiple requests.

“This is where freedom was won,” Mary Jo O’Bryan, 57, said during a Preserve Yorktown meeting at Hodson’s house.

## ‘Unbearable’ crowds

According to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), an estimated 35.7 million people are expected to cruise this year, 4 million more than 2023. Cruise lines will unveil more than 40 new ships over the next three years, including nine that can carry more than 5,000 passengers.

In pocket ports, the vessels reshape the landscape with towering stacks of cabins, a temporary skyline materializing on the water's edge. On cruise ship days in small towns in Maine and Alaska, locals say they can't drive without getting caught in traffic. Try to run errands, and you'll bump into a swarm of visitors.



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Megaports such as Miami, New Orleans and Galveston, Texas, have the room and resources to manage a daily influx of cruise passengers without infringing on residents' livelihoods. Activists in smaller destinations contend they do not, so the industry's influence feels more impactful and personal.

"Imagine inviting people to Christmas. For years your family shows up in a small car, and then the next year, they show up in a bus. All of them," said Sherry Corrington, a tour company owner who heads Skagway First, a local movement named after her Alaska town. "You can't handle that many people in your space."

In the northern climates, residents bear long, cold and dark winters. Losing the restorative days of summer to seasonal cruisers is especially agonizing.

"It started to feel oppressive," Corrington said. "Instead of looking forward to this season, we were dreading it. By the end of the season, we were just exhausted."

Carnival Corporation, a cruise operating company, emphasized its commitment to acting "responsibly and sustainably," a position echoed throughout the industry. As part of its [responsible tourism platform](#), CLIA told The Washington Post, it takes a "collaborative approach to tourism management" to "jointly self-regulate and preserve great resident and visitor experiences."

The association provided several examples, such as creating a comprehensive sustainability plan with local authorities in Dubrovnik, Croatia, based on U.N. criteria, and tourism management funding assessments in Corfu and Heraklion in Greece, with support from the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

## Governments want in

CLIA's 2023 Global Economic Impact Study characterizes the industry as an economic juggernaut. The association said the cruise lines generated \$168.6 billion globally, 9 percent more than 2019, and was responsible for 1.6 million jobs and \$56.9 billion in wages.

Carnival told The Post that governments representing cities, counties and even countries frequently approach the company asking for their ports to be added to sailing schedules. It said in a statement that the partnerships are a “win-win-win” for all parties involved.

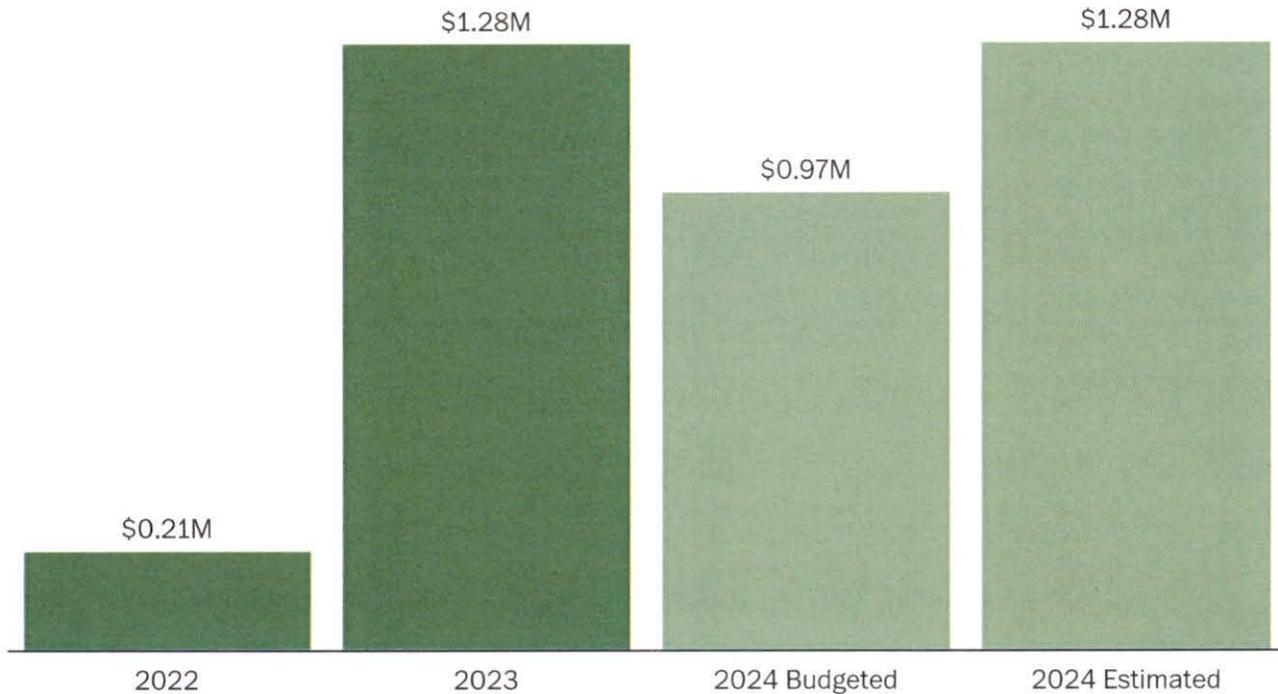


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“I don't think it's going to put a meaningful dent in tourism at all, honestly,” he said. “If people want to come to Acadia [National Park], they're going to come, and our harbor is the literal gateway community to Acadia.”

## Cruise revenues for Bar Harbor, Maine

Total non-tax revenue collected through passenger and port fees



Note: For fiscal years ending in June

Source: [FY25 Budget for Bar Harbor](#)

In 2022, Bar Harbor residents voted to cap the number of cruise visitors at 1,000 per day. Before the petition, Kevin DesVeaux and his wife, Jessica, would serve a packed lunch crowd at their West Street Cafe, near the tendering drop-off point. Their nearly 60 employees could support themselves on the eight-month cruising season, which in 2023 was shortened by two months.

Last year, he started to notice a decline in cruisers, which pinched his staff's incomes. Some of the dining room workers, he said, made \$20,000 less than they did in 2022.

“We’re contemplating not opening for lunch next year,” said DesVeaux, lead petitioner of the recount, “and that would require us laying off at least 15 full-time people.”



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spend money onshore, they will often frequent restaurants and retailers affiliated with the cruise lines and their partners, generally in places conveniently located in and around the terminals.

“They basically view it as their own version of Disneyland to design and play with and profit from as they wish,” Sidman said. “To hell with everybody else.”

Because the ships charge for internet access, passengers and crew members often wait until they are onshore to use their phones, overwhelming servers and cellphone towers.

“It’s not that we dislike cruise passengers. We dislike the damage the industry does.”

— Lynne Davison in Skagway, Alaska

Lynne Davison, a Skagway resident who drives a tour bus in the summer that is often filled with cruisers, said making phone calls and sending emails can be difficult at times.

They sit “outside or inside businesses, using the business’s WiFi and often not purchasing anything the business is selling,” she said. “There’s free WiFi outside the library, and it’s often crowded there.”

Davison and other residents acknowledge their reliance on tourists and the cruise trade, but they bristle at the excesses.

“It’s not that we dislike cruise passengers,” Davison said by email. “We dislike the damage the industry does to the environment, we dislike the crowds (including seasonal workers) that stress our infrastructure to the breaking point.”

Environmental concerns also unsettle the residents, who consider themselves stewards of the mountains, forests, waterways and wildlife that call these natural habitats home. Klein rebutted the cruise ship’s sustainability claims. He said fuel exhaust cleaning technology known as scrubbers, which the industry touts as a clean air solution, are actually sully the environment, a position supported by a 2021 study by the International Council on Clean Transportation.

Through this scrubbing process, the ships remove the pollutants from the exhaust — and dump the acidic waste in the water.

Friends of the Earth compiled a [list](#) of the industry's most egregious violations. One recent transgression has not yet made the compilation: In October, the Environmental Protection Agency fined Royal Caribbean \$473,685 for lapses in waste management while in port.



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In Yorktown, residents tried to share their concerns with Princess.

They wrote to the cruise line and received no response. The company held an invitation-only informational meeting, but Hodson said attendees were not allowed to ask questions on camera.

Not giving up, they voiced their opposition at board of supervisors meetings, posted “No Princess” signs in yards, spoke at local libraries and plotted a protest for the day Island Princess was scheduled to arrive. Along the waterfront, they would run crime-scene tape the length of the ship and float balloons as high as its smokestack. They considered organizing a parade of personal watercraft that would greet the guests with an uncommon show of Southern inhospitality.

In February, the town learned through social media and local news outlets that the cruise line was backing out. Hodson was relieved but still leery. Princess was considering Norfolk as an alternative, and his group still didn't have any legal protections against the industry. In his garage, he stored boxes of “No Princess” signs, fliers, buttons, and stickers.

Yorktown has managed to keep the cruise ships at bay. Other towns are less successful, but they've made progress.

This Election Day, Bar Harbor voters rejected a bill that would raise the cap for cruise passengers to 3,200 daily. They won by a slim 65 votes. Cruise ships are dropping Bar Harbor from their summer itineraries, said Gary Friedmann, a town councillor who voted against the increase.

“For now, the town's draconian plans are dead,” Sidman, who spearheaded the 2022 initiative, said during a Zoom meeting with the Global Cruise Activist Network. “We are in the watchful, waiting period.”

Juneau's results have been more mixed. This year, authorities in the Alaskan capital and CLIA agreed to voluntarily limit the number of lower berth passengers to 16,000 on Sunday through Friday and 12,000 on Saturdays, starting in 2026. (Lower berth represents two people per cabin, even for staterooms that can fit more people.) A November initiative to ban ships on Saturdays, however, failed.

For hardcore activists, Charleston, South Carolina, is a ray of hope. In May 2022, SC Ports and Carnival Cruise Line agreed to not extend the homeport cruise contract beyond this year, freeing up Union Pier Terminal for redevelopment. Then-Charleston Mayor John Tecklenburg reportedly said that terminating the deal, which will cut



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engaged.

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## Activists band together

Twice a month, the Global Cruise Activist Network, which counts about 400 members, holds a Zoom call.

Over an hour and a half, activists from around the globe update their peers on their most current successes, stumbles and strategies. On a recent Wednesday afternoon, participants signed on from Venice, the Bahamas, Maine, Seattle and three towns in Alaska.

Hodson was present, as was Friends of the Earth's Keever and Ellen Frankenstein, a Sitka, Alaska-based filmmaker whose documentary, "[Cruise Boom](#)," is airing on PBS. The film centers on Sitka residents scrambling to prepare for the onslaught of cruise visitors in 2022, when the number exceeded a record 400,000 people.

The group congratulated Sidman on Bar Harbor's victory, but over in Portland, Maine, JoAnn Locktov was frustrated. The Portland Cruise Control co-founder attended a city meeting that was intended to address the environmental impact of cruise ships. All she heard, she said, was a load of greenwashing from the presenters, a trio of cruise industry lobbyists.

"There was such a lack of transparency," she lamented on the call. "How do you get any information [from the cruise ship industry] and not be lied to?"

Hodson, who is still in the fight, discussed Yorktown's latest move: submitting a petition to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality to consider regulating ocean-class cruise ships in state waters. With Friends of the Earth's help, the proposal received roughly 7,500 signatures.

On the most recent call last week, he shared his disappointment with the state's air and water control boards, which denied the petition. Gazing into the video lens with a downcast expression, Hodson admitted he was feeling deflated. But he knew he'd bounce back, bolstered by the support that sprung from the activist network and rippled outward to Yorktown and beyond.

“There’s a therapeutic aspect to these meetings,” Hodson said to the sea of sympathetic faces. “They make you more hopeful and give us a fighting chance.”



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