

Tourism Bureau Preps for Summer Cruises

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Local businesses and attractions are preparing to welcome visitors as the Mississippi River cruise season starts up.

“We always want to put out the welcome mat for our cruise ships because we hope those passengers enjoy our area as much as we do as residents, and we hope they return as new visitors at future stops,” Cory Jobe, president of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau, said.

Jobe said the cruise schedule is “robust” throughout the summer into late October. The tourism bureau will provide visitors with tours, restaurant guides, small business shopping information and more.

He explained that the bureau works with travelers, travel writers and tour operators from around the world. Great Rivers & Routes can connect these visitors with local shops and restaurants, which can have a significant economic effect. They suggest that local business owners prepare for the economic opportunities provided by the cruise season.

“I would just encourage business owners here in the Riverbend area to continue to connect with us and make sure we have the latest and greatest information of their business on our website and our promotional and marketing materials,” Jobe said.

Before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, a study showed that the Mississippi River cruise industry had a \$6 million impact on Alton alone.

“That was prior to the pandemic, and now we have more cruise ships in port today than we’ve ever had,” Jobe said.

The tourism bureau will alert businesses of cruise dates as they approach. Great Rivers & Routes also plans to keep [their website](#) and social media pages updated.

The first cruise ship will arrive at Alton on July 2. [American Cruise Lines](#), [American Queen Voyages](#) and [Viking Cruises](#) will dock ships in Alton and Grafton throughout the summer.

In addition to the cruise industry, many road-trippers are expected to hit the Riverbend this summer. The Alton area is within a five-hour drive of several major cities, including St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis and the Quad Cities. Jobe said the Riverbend has a lot to offer for all of these travelers.

“Having the Mississippi River at our back door, and great outdoor nature-based tourism products, from the history of Lewis and Clark to the National Great Rivers Museum to all the outdoor products up in Grafton and historic sites here — those are our big drivers for travel,” Jobe said.

The bureau will offer many programs and events this summer, which they hope will entice tourists. They plan to produce over 150 tours of the region throughout the cruise season alone. The bureau also works with cruise lines to take passengers to the [Lewis and Clark State Historic Site](#), [Cahokia Mounds](#) and other nearby historic attractions.

Great Rivers & Routes encourages business owners to stay up-to-date and involved with the bureau. They will continue to advertise local businesses, restaurants and festivals. The bureau hopes the summer tourism and the Mississippi River cruise season will once again have a positive impact on the Riverbend area.

“If somebody ever asks, ‘What’s there to do in this area?’ and they say, ‘Nothing,’ I don’t know what rock they’re living under,” Jobe said. “There are so many wonderful events, festivals, unique sights, attractions, business, live music, outdoor nature. It’s plenty to keep you busy in the summer months here in our region.”