FAST FACTS:

50%

Half of cruise ships sailing in the Baltic Sea are ships with a maximum capacity of 1,500 people, including staff and passengers. Roughly 10% are large ships with the potential to hold at least 4,000 people.

66%

Two-thirds of cruise ship port calls are made in either St. Petersburg, Copenhagen, Tallinn, Helsinki, or Stockholm.

80%

80% of international cruise ship calls in the Baltic Sea occur regionally, from one coastal country to another.

7 months

The cruising season in the Baltic Sea lasts seven months from April to October, with the bulk of port calls taking place during the summer months.

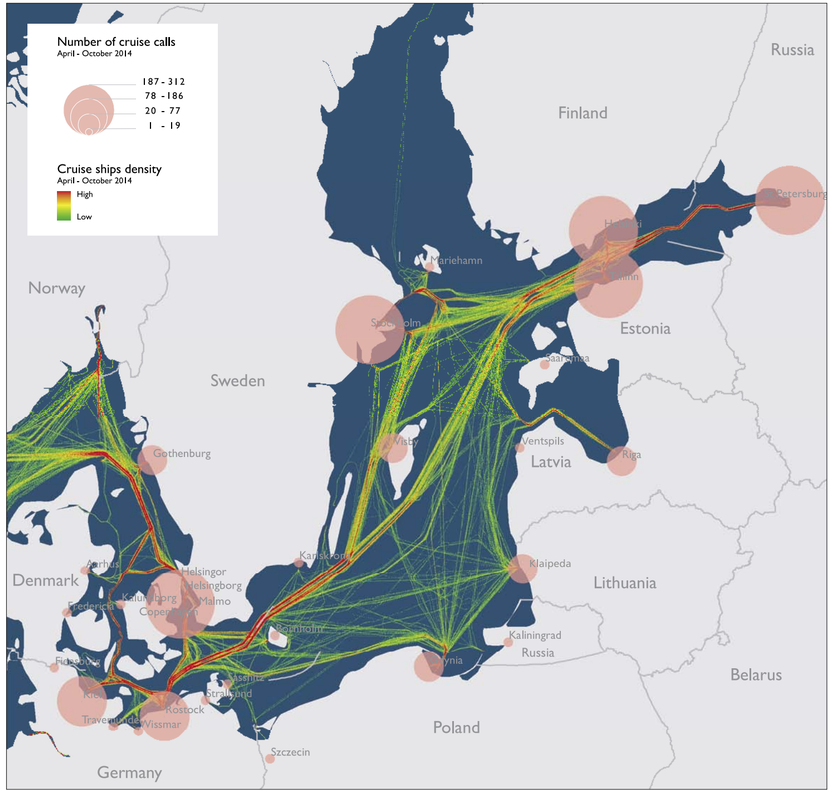
8+ hours

Travel from one port to another usually lasts between 8 and 20 hours and cruise ships typically stay in port 8-10 hours.

7 million

International cruise ship voyages totalled 7.15 million person days in 2014.

SOURCE: HELCOM 2015, BALTIC SEA SEWAGE PORT RECEPTION FACILITIES, HELCOM OVERVIEW 2014.



LAYOUT: YKSINOLLA BRANDING | COVER PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK | PRINTING: TRIO-OFFSET

HELCOM.FI | HELCOM – Helsinki Commission | Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, FI-00160 Helsinki, Finland
Phone: +358 207 412 649 | helcom.secretariat@helcom.fi

SHIPS' SEWAGE IN THE BALTIC SEA

– NEW SPECIAL AREA REGULATIONS

HELCOM – BALTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMISSION

"With over 7 million person days spent on cruise ships, proper sewage disposal is important for the health of the Baltic Sea.

photo: EVIKKA / SHUTTERSTOCK

TIMELINE: The HELCOM efforts to limit ships' sewage discharges into the Baltic Sea

1975
HELCOM's Maritime Working Group is established (as Working Group II of the HELCOM Interim Commission) to discuss sewage from ships and other sea-based pollution sources.

1980
The first HELCOM Recommendations targeting sewage from ships adopted.

1996
HELCOM's Baltic Sea Strategy on Port Reception Facilities ("Baltic Strategy") introduced a round of concrete improvements of sewage reception facilities in Baltic Sea ports.

1998
"No-Special-Fee" (NSF) Recommendation promoting the regional best practice of no additional charges when leaving sewage or other waste in ports.

2005
HELCOM Heads of Delegation consider how to best limit ship sewage discharges.

2007
The decision is made to propose amendments to the MARPOL Convention (International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships) Annex IV on sewage.

2010
A proposal drafted through HELCOM's Maritime Group is sent to the IMO Marine Environment Protection Committee to create the legal concept of a sewage "special area" and designate the Baltic Sea as such an area.

2010
The HELCOM-led Baltic Sea Cooperation Platform – made up of the shipping industry, technology providers, ports, and national authorities – starts to work on best practices on how to deliver sewage to port reception facilities and solve open issues in the region.

2011
IMO amends the MARPOL Convention and designates the Baltic Sea as a special area for sewage. However, it will only be applied when adequate sewage port reception facilities are available.

2016
All HELCOM countries have informed IMO that adequate facilities for sewage are available. IMO declares that the special area for sewage discharges from passenger ships will go into effect by latest 2021, with an extension until 2023 for direct passages between St. Petersburg and the North Sea.

photo: METSÄHALLITUS NHS / ESSI KESKINEN

THE FIRST OF ITS KIND WORLDWIDE

The Baltic was the first sea in the world to receive status as a special area for sewage and have this status enforced by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). Set to come into effect in June 2021, passenger ships, including cruise ships, will be limited to discharging sewage into port reception facilities or alternatively at sea only after treatment with very advanced on-board sewage treatment plants able to reduce nutrient input into the sea.

IMO declared the Baltic Sea a special area for sewage in 2011 based on a joint application by the Baltic Sea countries. The decision was taken to enforce the status in 2016, when IMO received notice from coastal countries that adequate port reception facilities were available. Coastal countries, as well as ports and passenger shipping interest organizations and NGOs, continue their collective efforts to further improve availability of adequate sewage port reception facilities across the Baltic Sea area.

IS SHIP SEWAGE A PROBLEM?

Passenger traffic by sea is important to the whole Baltic Sea region but it should not be a burden to the vulnerable marine environment. Sewage created by these vessels contains nutrients, such as Phosphorus and Nitrogen, which aggravate algal blooms and other symptoms of eutrophication, one of the main environmental concerns in the Baltic Sea area.

Global rules on ship sewage have typically addressed sanitary concerns of sewage – but not nutrient content. At the same time, the Baltic coastal countries have applied increasingly stringent nutrient limits to sewage discharges from land.

While not the biggest source of nutrients in the Baltic Sea, ship sewage is not insignificant. With over 7.15 million person days spent on cruise ships in the Baltic Sea, and 40 million international ferry passengers per year, proper sewage disposal is important to protect the health of the Baltic Sea.

WHAT WILL CHANGE?

Under the general IMO MARPOL Annex IV regulations, sewage can be discharged when 12 nautical miles from the nearest land.

Many environmentally conscious ships have voluntarily avoided this, discharging sewage only at port reception facilities, however, this has not been a requirement.

Under the special area rules coming into effect, passenger vessels' sewage waste must be unloaded at port reception facilities or treated on-board with a special area-certified treatment plant before release into the sea.

WHEN WILL IT COME INTO EFFECT?

The special area regulations will be applied on or after 1 June 2021 for existing IMO-registered passenger ships. For new passenger ships, the regulations come into effect on or after 1 June 2019. For direct passages between St. Petersburg and the North Sea, there is an extension until 1 June 2023.

BALTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMISSION (HELCOM)

HELCOM's main goal is to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all sources of pollution, and to restore and safeguard its ecological balance. HELCOM's vision for the future is a healthy Baltic Sea environment with diverse biological components functioning in balance, resulting in a good ecological status and supporting a wide range of sustainable economic and social activities.

Building on its experience and deriving from its key position in bridging science and policy making, HELCOM today leads and coordinates various processes for an improved marine environment to benefit all.

HELCOM members are all the nine Baltic coastal nations: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden as well as the EU. HELCOM's co-operation is unique in bringing together actors from different institutions, sectors and interest groups.