Aquila Connects the Classroom to the Cruise Industry

Turning tourism education into real-world skills, credentials and opportunities



A Holland College student completes an online component of Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence's Tour Guide Excellence Certification program with support from an instructor.

SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA, September 11, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence is advancing a workforce development model that brings cruise industry standards, practical skills and professional credentials directly into tourism education – helping create stronger pathways for the next generation to enter and succeed in the industry.

Drawing on more than four decades of tourism experience and decades of cruise operations, Aquila's programs are field-tested through its operational Living Lab in Saint John, New Brunswick, Canada, which welcomes more than 178,000 cruise guests each season. This direct exposure to the cruise guest experience allows Aquila, the exclusive training partner of the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA), to translate real-world operational lessons into practical learning for destinations and their people.

"If we want to strengthen the future of cruise tourism, we need to think beyond today's operations and actively create pathways for the next generation to enter, understand and thrive in this industry," said Beth Hatt, president of Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence. "When we bring industry-recognized training directly into the classroom, we aren't just teaching theory. We are building confidence, developing practical skills and helping students see a real pathway from education into the cruise and tourism industry."

One example of this approach is Aquila's partnership with Holland College in Canada. Through a hybrid pilot program, tourism students completed the internationally recognized Tour Guide

Excellence Certification alongside their academic studies. Combining classroom instruction with online learning, standard-driven written exams and video assessments, the program gave students an industry-recognized professional credential as well as practical storytelling skills aligned with global guest expectations.



Visitors participate in a guided experience in Saint John, New Brunswick, home to Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence's operational Living Lab.



A costumed guide welcomes visitors in Saint John, demonstrating the storytelling and guest-engagement skills central to Aquila's training programs.

The integrated model is designed to be adapted across tourism colleges throughout the Caribbean, Central America and beyond, creating opportunities for students to graduate with both academic knowledge and industry-aligned skills they can apply in the workplace.

Aquila's people-first philosophy is grounded in its own operational experience. Guides have built careers with the organization spanning 10, 20 and more than 25 years, reinforcing Aquila's belief that investing in people should extend beyond initial training to continued learning, professional growth and meaningful opportunities within tourism.

Building the next generation of tourism professionals cannot sit with educational institutions alone. Tourism authorities, ports, tour operators, cruise lines and educators all have a role in creating stronger connections between learning, employment and industry expectations.

By building those connections earlier, destinations can strengthen service quality today while creating a pipeline of knowledgeable, confident local professionals ready to shape the future of cruise tourism.

To learn more about implementing industry-aligned training programs or partnering with Aquila,

visit cruiseexcellence.com.

About Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence
Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence is the leading destination training provider for the global cruise industry. Drawing on more than four decades of experience operating Aquila Tours and its Living Lab in Saint John, New Brunswick — where exceptional guest experiences are designed, tested and refined daily — the organization delivers training and development programs for destinations, tour companies, tour guides and front-line operators. Aquila is committed to cruise destination success through values-driven partnerships with cruise lines and destination stakeholders. For more information on Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence and its training programs, visit cruiseexcellence.com.

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