Tourism Minister Dr Chris Burns today welcomed the Super Star Virgo to Port Darwin.

Virgo is part of the Star Cruises line, the third largest cruise line in the world and the largest in the Asia Pacific region.

The Super Star Virgo is in Port for 13/14 June and will revisit Darwin on July 16. The Super Star Leo will also visit Darwin later this year, on July 26/27, on its way back to Singapore. Both the Super Star Virgo and Leo were re-positioned out of Asia earlier this year, due to the downturn of tourism in the region from the SARS outbreak.

"While the SARS outbreak has dampened the tourism industry in general, it has also provided some opportunities for the Territory to expand into new areas", said Dr Burns. "The visits of these two Super Star liners have been a welcome and important win for Darwin."

"On this visit, Virgo will have around 600 mostly Australian passengers on board. Darwin will be used as a turnaround port - with some people getting off and a different lot getting on. This will be one of the largest turnarounds in passengers that Darwin has undertaken and is a fantastic coup for the city."

"The average cruise passenger spends about $138 per day on shore excursions, with additional expenditure on pre and post touring. This visit by Super Star Virgo will provide a major financial benefit to Territorians and is expected to inject between $1 million and $2 million into the local economy."

"The Super Star Virgo is based out of Fremantle and Super Star Leo is based out of Sydney. In line with meetings held with Star cruises in Singapore, the Martin Government is continuing to work hard to promote Darwin as a regular call or turnaround point for Star Cruises", Dr Burns added.

The Super Star Virgo is the biggest cruise ship to visit Darwin, however the QEII was the longest ship. An even bigger ship, the Star Princess owned by P&O Cruises, has a visit planned in 2004.

Super Star Virgo statistics:

268 metre long
75,000 gross tonnage
Speed 25.5 knots
Capacity of 2,800 pax and 1,125 crew