Tell me about your role and what makes it exciting?

MedCruise is a vibrant association representing over 100 ports and 30 associate members in 20 countries in the Mediterranean and its adjoining seas. The expansion of cruising over the last twenty years was based on the attractiveness of these magnificent destinations and the capacity of respective ports to accommodate cruise calls and passengers. The driving force to join in 2013 the association that unites all major cruise related events around the globe, whether or not they provide the infrastructure to our members to be present in the Mediterranean and adjoining seas?

How does MedCruise promote the cruise industry in the Mediterranean region?

The driving force to join in 2013 the association that unites all the prospects that this will continue to be a class opportunity to develop a source of demand for opportunities for expansion to be realised.

How relevant is Gibraltar’s cruise industry compared to other cruise destinations in the Mediterranean?

Gibraltar is a cruise destination that has for long attracted the genuine interest of cruise passengers and cruise lines. Two hundred cruise calls and approximately 300,000 passengers visit Gibraltar every year, with the port adjusting continuously and effectively to the challenges that occur. There are all the prospects that this will continue to be a cruise destination of interest, an essential passage in some of the most exciting cruise itineraries in the Med. As such, cruise will continue to generate value and benefit the local economy.

Mediterranean cruises are appealing to tourists. What are the main advantages?

The Mediterranean Sea is a unique world region. It unites three continents and more than 20 different countries with diverge cultural identities. This is unique in all respects. Within cruise itineraries that last between four and 15 days, cruise passengers have the opportunity to sense the history, the culture, the food, the music, the people of an impressive diversity of cultures in the Med and its adjoining seas is a positive back- ground for opportunities for expansion to be realised.

Finally, I need to emphasise that we see the first Association that visited Asia, in fact we did so for two successive years, as we see there a first-class opportunity to develop a source market that will bring more cruise passengers in the Med in the future. MedCruise is heading ‘East’ with this expansion including the participation in cruise events in Asia, the circu- lation of special brochures in Chinese and Korean present- ing the attractiveness of the Mediterranean region, the pub- lication of three editions of the MedCruise ports brochure while right now we are working on a targeted marketing strategy exclusively focusing on the Chinese market.

How do members benefit from their association to MedCruise?

The Association assists its members in benefiting from the growth of the cruise industry by providing networking, as well as promotional and professional development opportu- nities. Some of the key benefits that the Association offers to its membership are listed above.

Internally, our members are actively involved in the work of the Association. The sharing of experiences, the collabora- tion between our members has helped them to increase the value of their work and improve the services the port of the region offer to cruise lines. The platform we regularly offer them to discuss with cruise lines is offering unique opportunity to them. While these are not always evident to observers, it is an accomplishment acknowledged by our members and has a significant impact to the improvement of the cruise services offered by MedCruise ports.

Do you foresee future growth within the cruise industry in the Mediterranean?

Over the last decade ports in the Med experienced the bene- fit of expandingly deployment strategy by cruise lines. The impact is remarkable in all respects: 197% growth of deployed beds since 2002, and a 49% growth of de- ployed beds days since 2008. The trend continued even when the global financial crisis of 2008 affected the passen- gers source markets most of all, or the multiple political and economic crisis became evident in the region more recently. Cruise in the Med has survived the ‘perfect storm’.

Given the strong consumer interest in cruising, the expan- sion of destinations and itineraries, and not least the further modernisation of the cruise fleet and cruise product, stake- holders look forward to further growth. The comparatively moderate estimates forecasts that the number of passen- gers to cruise worldwide in 2018 to be more than 24 million. Whether the Mediterranean region will continue to grow, either in absolute numbers, or in terms of market shares, is subject to a number of parameters. Within cruise ports con- tinuing to respond to the challenges, to adapt operational practices and infrastructures, and to advance the integration of the cruise related strategies of each destination stake- holders, the wide variety of cruise destinations, features, and cultures in the Med and its adjoining seas is a positive back- ground for opportunities for expansion to be realised.

What has been the greatest achievement of your career?

Working in the port industry and studying ports for more than two decades, I would highlight three best moments. The first one was the trust of UNCTAD and OECD to work for them on the financing of port developments, and on cruise shipping and cruise port respectively. The second one was my appointment by the Greek Government as General Secretary for Ports and port policy. Last, but not least, a key achievement has been the decision of MedCruise to renew my term as Secretary General of the Association for a second term.

Your memorable cruise ship experience:

The first one, being a youngster in the early 1980’s cruising the gulf of Saronicos in Greece with my parents onboard an Epirotiki Lines vessel continues to be the magical cruise moment of my life.

Your favourite book:

You learn a lot reading history, so I would mention “The Age of Extremes: The short 20th century” by my favorite histori- an, the late Eric Hobsbawm.

Your favourite cruise ship:

I have to admit that I was impressed when on board Oasis of the Seas. Yet each vessel I have visited has its own unique charm to be discovered – an open invitation to join a cruise.

Thanos Pallis, Secretary General of MedCruise, the association representing cruise ports in the Mediterranean and adjoining seas. As a maritime economist, Thanos specialises in Port Economics, Management and Policy, and we welcome his interview in such a key month - September - for the cruise industry.

Thanos Pallis

SECRETARY GENERAL MEDCruise

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