



# CRUISE INDUSTRY LEADERS COME TOGETHER AT POSIDONIA SEA TOURISM FORUM

## THE FUTURE OF THE EAST MED IN THE SPOTLIGHT

With the cruise season in full swing, the 4<sup>th</sup> Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum will once again place the East Mediterranean on center stage. Given the geo-political challenges faced at this juncture, it will be an especially valuable opportunity to gauge trends and developments, as well as address the future of the region's sea tourism and its recovery potential.

Leading personalities and decision makers from the international cruise industry will meet with the region's stakeholders and government officials, including Greece's Ministers of Shipping and Tourism, to discuss destination development strategies and drivers for future growth.

The Forum will be held at the Megaron Athens International Conference Centre on 23-24 May under the theme 'Reinventing Cruising in the East Mediterranean'. The Forum will be attended among others by

- Richard Vogel, President & CEO, Pullmantur
- Larry Pimentel, President & CEO, Azamara Cruises
- Kerry Anastasiadis, CEO Celestyal Cruises & Chairman, CLIA Europe
- Michel Nestour, Vice President, Global Port & Destination Development - EuroMed, Carnival Corp.
- Claudius Docekal, Vice President, Deployment, Crystal Cruises
- Elisabetta De Nardo, Global Head of Port Operations & Destination Management, Silversea Cruises
- Craig Milan, Vice President Operations, Virgin Voyages
- Ukko Metsola, Vice President Government Relations, Royal Caribbean Cruises
- Ana Karina Santini, Public Relations Italy & Med Port Development Manager, Royal Caribbean - Celebrity Cruises - Azamara Club Cruises

There is general consensus on the fact that in spite of its geopolitical challenges, the region's appeal in cruise markets remains too strong to be ignored.



"The East Med is one of the key regions for Pullmantur Cruises' deployment in Europe," said **Richard Vogel, President & CEO** of the Madrid based cruise line. "We plan to include more and new exclusive destinations such as Volos, that will bring closer the Meteora Monasteries - included in the UNESCO World Heritage List - to our guests and Nafplio from where our passengers will visit Epidaurus, Corinth and

Mycenae. There is no doubt regarding the interest that Greece generates among our guests due to its cultural wealth, landscape, its beaches and its good weather."



**Larry Pimentel, President and CEO, Azamara Cruises**, added: "While we have scaled back on our Black Sea cruises as well as cruises that go to Turkey, Greece continues to be a popular destination for Azamara. Greece will continue to be on future itineraries and we routinely call at 10-12 different Greek ports each season."

**Elisabetta De Nardo, Global Head of Port Operations & Destination Management, Silversea Cruises**, agrees: "As more and more Greek islands open up to cruise guests, many for the first time, the incredible beauty and wonder of the region have never been more accessible. The recent cancellation of cabotage restrictions allows us to actively look at new potential itineraries and opportunities in the area. With the support of local ground operators, we are keen to ensure that Silversea ships continue to visit this desirable region."



Samos, Chania in Crete and Nafplio are the latest Greek destinations to join Celestyal Cruises' Aegean itinerary, according to **Kerry Anastasiadis, CEO, Celestyal Cruises & President, CLIA Europe**.

"We're committed to adding new destinations to our itineraries every year. Four years ago we visited six harbors - this season we will sail to 15, and we will continue to develop new destinations to add to our itineraries. There are so many breathtaking destinations in the Aegean, and we will continue to bring our passengers to these incredible gems," he said. "The Eastern Mediterranean is the foundation of our business and our brand. Greece is home to myriad "bucket list" destinations for travelers from the world over, and our cruises are woven with elements of each destination, on board and ashore, so our guests get to take a deep dive at every port of call, to really "live" each destination" he continued.

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However, much needs to be done to increase cruise traffic to Greece and the region. **Claudius Docekal, Vice President, Deployment, Crystal Cruises** commented: "When I started my career in the industry, the combination of cruising the Greek Isles, Egypt and Israel was magical and one of the best sellers. A resurrection of this destination combination would be to the benefit of the entire East Med region. Sadly, all three destinations continue to have their issues. We are slowly trying to rebuild the number of

sailings in this region while carefully watching demand. Unfortunately, the demand for Greece has, at least, from my view, not grown to anywhere near where it was and where it should be. The magic of Greece requires renewed marketing efforts."

Geo-political developments and the intensifying need for new destinations and itineraries are compelling reason for cruise industry executives to attend this year's Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum.

The Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum also attracted Virgin Voyages, a start up cruise line that acknowledges the value of the East Mediterranean and although this region is not in their immediate plans, it is a part of their long term strategy. **Craig Milan, Vice President Operations, Virgin Voyages** commented: "As a new entrant in the cruise market without a ship in the water, the Eastern Med is not important to us now.



However, as our business scales and we increase our capacity, the Eastern Med will become an important region for us to consider deploying vessels. The region has some of the most interesting and compelling historic and cultural sites anywhere in the world. However, given the current geopolitical issues in the region, the East Med will remain a challenging place to deploy ships. We are positive about the future prospects for the region and believe it will turnaround. This is particularly true, given the growth of the industry and the number of ships being constructed over the next 5 years. Nevertheless, we believe Greece has a lot to offer the Virgin Voyages brand and it fits well with our target markets' mindset and demographics. We particularly believe the Greek Isles that attract a younger, vibrant crowd would be a great fit for our brand."

According to **Theodore Vokos, Executive Director, Posidonia Exhibitions SA**, the organisers of the event, this year's Forum has already attracted representatives from all sectors of the sea tourism industry: "We have received strong interest from companies and individuals who wish to be present at our event, to attend the rich conference agenda or display their offering, destination or related service in order to gain the opportunity to network and mingle with the top brass of the cruise industry. Interest is particularly strong from ports & destinations, tourist service providers, airlines, sector publishers and new technologies, as well as from sectors related to the yachting & marina industry, also very prominently featured in the Forum", added Vokos.

Major port associations and organisations have also confirmed their attendance at Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum 2017, among them **Kristijan Pavić, President, MedCruise, Emre Sayin, CEO, Global Ports Holding, Figen Ayan, Vice President, Istanbul Port Cruise Operations and Eleftherios Hadjizacharia, Chairman of Cyprus Ports Authority.**

## AIRLINE PARTNERS FLY IN TOP CRUISE EXECS



Many of the world's cruise industry decision-makers will be travelling to Athens for the **4th Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum** with SkyTeam global airline alliance's members Air France, KLM, and Delta Airlines, as the Paris, Amsterdam and Atlanta headquartered carriers are supporting this year's event as Silver Sponsors. The three airlines have created a highly compelling and competitive offering for the general marine business segment as well as for the cruising segment.

Customers can take advantage from a common fare to travel from the USA to Greece, via the Schiphol Amsterdam and Charles de Gaulle Paris hubs with Air France and KLM, or directly from New York' JFK International Airport with Delta Airlines. Frequent connections to the East Med and especially Greece will contribute to increased homeporting in the region in the future.

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