

THE MEDITERRANEAN TO BECOME TOP CRUISE DESTINATION



The cruise industry represents over 27 million passengers in the Mediterranean, a number that has increased by 23.6% between 2009 and 2013. The Mediterranean is likely to overcome the Caribbean and become the first world cruise destination.

Jacques Truau, President of the Club de Croisière de Marseille Provence, described the growing figures: "The cruise market accounted for 380,000 passengers in France two years ago. We have 500,000 this year, and we are expecting 800,000 in 2016!" **The port of Marseille expects 1.35 million cruise passengers in 2014 compared to 1,190,000 in 2013.** At the port cruisers account for 55% of passenger traffic. Marseille is thus gradually reaping the fruits of its investments including EUR 76 million dedicated to infrastructure adaptation.

"With 525 stops this year, we hope to soon enter the top five cruise ports in the world, while in 2012 we were on the ninth position," said Jacques Truau.

The economy benefits from the cruise industry significantly. According to CCI Marseille-Provence, the turnover linked directly or indirectly to cruises in Marseilles reached EUR 164 million between January 1 and December 31, 2013. According to Truau, the growth in cruise passengers is reported from all around the Mediterranean.

"The Mediterranean has all the assets to exceed the Caribbean and become the world's top cruise destination," adds Stavros Hatzakos, president of the Med Cruise Association, bringing together hundreds of ports and nineteen countries in the Mediterranean.

"Culture, history, gastronomy, cities, landscapes and unique sites within a very short distance - the supply of Mediterranean cruises is quite exceptional, plus there is the option to focus on four or five days visiting several extremely touristic countries, such as Spain, France and Italy, Greece and Turkey or Egypt," said Hatzakos. He expects a new wave of Asian tourists coming to the Mediterranean for cruises. In 2013, there were 727,000 Chinese passengers.

Jacques Truau remains skeptical of this prospective, recalling that the primary target markets are the United States, Great Britain and Germany, which now account for nearly 80% of the passengers in the Mediterranean. But both men agree on the growth potential of the market related to the change in the profile of the cruise: "The average age of the clients in the Mediterranean has dramatically dropped to reach a younger audience and the market is open to a much broader panel," confirmed Stavros Hatzakos.

Several factors explain this trend: first, the drop in prices, but also the qualitative improvement of the offer, better suited to different travelers such as families, or the diversification of destinations, with stops in Mallorca or Santorini, which are also more interested in the younger clientele.

The changes benefit primarily to Barcelona, where 2.6 million cruise passengers will call this year. The Catalan capital is still the first port of call for Mediterranean cruises, and the world's fourth

behind the three major American ports of Florida (Everglades, Miami and Port Canaveral).

As a symbol of leadership, Barcelona has received the largest cruise ship in the world, Oasis of the Seas from Royal Caribbean. Now they are waiting for its "twin ship", the Allure of the Seas, which will also be based in the city of Gaudi to perform twenty-five Mediterranean cruises in 2015.

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