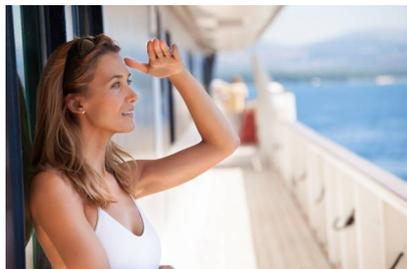


MOROCCAN CRUISE SECTOR STEADILY DECLINING



For several months, the number of cruise ship passengers going ashore in Moroccan ports has been in free fall. According to professionals, this trend illustrates the agony which has taken hold of the Moroccan cruise sector which was previously considered to be a true niche for tourism.

Fewer and fewer cruise ship passengers are visiting the Moroccan kingdom, while the segment is classified by the public authorities as one of the most important niches for attracting even more tourists to the country.

In the first three months of 2017, only 66 390 cruise passengers transited through the various ports of Morocco, which represents a 17% decrease compared to the same period in 2016. Worse still, the numbers for the first quarter of 2017 are only the latest confirmation of a trend which has been observed for several months now.

According to travel agency professionals, the Moroccan cruise sector is experiencing a real downturn due to a combination of different factors which are making the “Morocco” destination very unattractive to cruisers. The first factor is the quality of the reception received at the nation's ports. It is far from meeting international standards. According to a local professional, a good example is Casablanca where the berthing of cruise ships is done at the terminal reserved for agricultural products or on quays intended for the transport of goods. It is easy to imagine the reaction of tourists who find themselves in the middle of all that!

The subsequent factors are related to the steps taken by the immigration services at ports or the security apparatus in place. They both work to excessively delay departure times for excursion, knowing that most tourists only come ashore for a single day. Losing four or five hours in administrative procedures causes significant inconvenience to operators whose clients routinely renounce their interest in participating in excursions.

The impact of these factors on the flow of cruise passengers transiting through the country has been amplified, according to our sources, by the decision taken by one of the most important Mediterranean cruise companies - the Italian company Costa Cruises. The company's ships made over forty stops at Moroccan ports in 2016, but it is preparing to divide this number by four. Apparently, the company asked that police officers or law enforcement officials be present on the buses used for the excursions. The Interior Minister apparently refused, considering that the current security context in the country did not warrant such a measure.

This is all to say that there are a number of factors which are now inhibiting cruise ship activity, and even threatening the future of some ports which had wagered a lot on this segment of tourism.

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