



## THE EAST MED IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT PSTF

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER CRUISE GROWTH IN THE REGION

As the 8th Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum (PSTF) opens its doors in Heraklion this May, the spotlight is firmly on the Eastern Mediterranean, where the cruise industry faces multiple challenges potentially slowing its growth. These range from concerns about overcrowding and its strain on local environments and resources to port infrastructure deficiencies and geopolitical uncertainties.

Under the theme **“The Med: A Compelling Need for New Marquee Ports & Destinations,”** this year’s forum will bring together key industry stakeholders, industry leaders and policy makers to explore these pressing issues and find solutions. Discussions will focus on solutions and strategies to overcome these challenges while unlocking new opportunities for sustainable and consistent growth.

“The wider Eastern Mediterranean faces complex dynamics,” said **George Koumpenas, President, Hellenic Cruise Ship Owners and Associated Members’ Union (EEKFN),** “The ongoing Gaza conflict and escalating security risks in the Red Sea have significantly contracted the cruise footprint across the region, echoing patterns last seen after the Arab Spring. Key markets such as Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, and parts of Southern Turkey are experiencing a notable downturn.”

Despite these pressures, Greece has demonstrated resilience, with strong recovery figures post-pandemic and promising forecasts.

According to data from the **Hellenic Ports’ Association (E.LIM.E.),** Greece recorded 5,490 cruise ship calls in 2024, representing a total of 7,927,709 passenger visits - an increase of 260 calls and 924,559 passenger movements compared to the previous year. Homeporting activity continues its upward trend, with Piraeus leading the charge with 635 cruise turnarounds and over 1.1 million passengers, followed by Corfu, Heraklion, Lavrion, and Thessaloniki.

But challenges to further growth remain. Although the region recovered quickly after the pandemic crisis, Turkey has yet to reach its erstwhile heights as a dominant cruise magnet. With a potential reopening of cruising in the Black Sea not in sight, coupled with Turkey’s slower recovery, the performance of Greek ports in the Northern and Eastern Aegean sea has also been impacted to a degree.

These fast-changing dynamics and the disparity in the growth pattern between destinations in the same region, make itinerary and vessel deployment planning even more complex. The trend of cruise lines also deploying larger vessels in the Eastern Mediterranean to meet growing demand is going to feature high in the list of PSTF topics. While these ships offer economies of scale and increased passenger capacity, they strain the region’s port and tourism infrastructure, especially when there are multiple ships in port. Marquee destinations are now imposing daily passenger caps or passenger taxes, as is the case with Santorini and its 8,000-person per day limit, while other ports are contemplating similar restrictions.

Without coordinated action, infrastructure limitations could hinder further growth. “A more holistic and forward-thinking development strategy is now essential,” said **Athanasios Liagos, Chairman, E.LIM.E.** “Investments must be directed at both expanding and modernising Greek ports, and also those at smaller emerging destinations, and at the same time safeguarding the cultural and environmental heritage that makes these destinations attractive in the first place.”

Cruise stakeholders will call for enhanced collaboration between governments and the cruise industry to earmark specific destinations for sustainable expansion. Larger vessels are expected to remain the industry standard, making it crucial to identify ports with the capacity - and the means and ambition - to upgrade facilities without compromising authenticity.

“As operators, we see enormous potential in the East Med beyond the traditional hotspots,” commented **Manolis Alevropoulos, Vice President, Marine Operations, Celebrity Cruises – Royal Caribbean Group.** “With the right infrastructure and destination management, several underutilized ports could emerge as marquee destinations in their own right, unlocking tremendous value for travellers and local economies alike.”

There are several mainland and island destinations across the whole region with great potential for an infrastructure upgrade that could support larger vessels and provide valuable travel experiences, but remain dormant and unexploited. Any future growth strategy will have to take this destination potential into account.

The PSTF will feature a dedicated presentation of the **METAVASEA PROJECT**, organized by **HELMPEPA.** Financed by the Lloyd’s Register Foundation, this five-year project aims to map the existing infrastructure for maritime decarbonisation in Greece, Cyprus, and the Eastern Mediterranean, while empowering seafarers, port workers and maritime executives through flexible training tools for retraining. The programme seeks to train and upskill 1,500 employees on key issues, including new fuels, enhanced safety culture onboard ships and in ports, digital transition, soft skills, environmental leadership, and marine environmental awareness.

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## HERAKLION PORT FOCUSES ON CRUISE

The cruise industry is of vital importance to the **Heraklion Port Authority (HPA)**, serving as one of the primary pillars of its strategic development as a key hub for cruise tourism in the Eastern Mediterranean. HPA is currently undergoing a significant transformation since it officially became part of the Grimaldi Group, and is now preparing for its third PSTF, which this year will be held a stone's throw away at the Mikis Theodorakis Convention Centre. This strategic development is expected to bring substantial investments aimed at enhancing infrastructure and services for the cruise industry. Future plans include potential upgrades in port facilities, improved passenger amenities, and innovative solutions to support sustainable growth. **Minas Papadakis, CEO, Heraklion Port Authority SA**, said: "The port remains committed to providing high-quality services to cruise operators and visitors. PSTF 2025 offers a vital platform to showcase the Port of Heraklion's growing capabilities and sustainable innovations. As a Diamond Sponsor of the event, we are proud to support this key gathering of industry leaders and present our strategic initiatives that enhance our services and contribute to the cruise industry's growth in the Eastern Mediterranean".

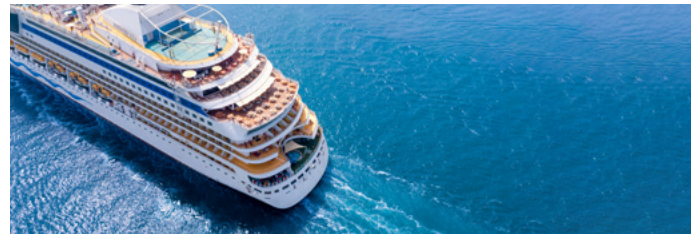


## REGION OF CRETE TO SHOWCASE ISLAND'S DIVERSE OFFERING AT PSTF 2025

The Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum is one of the 36 tourism exhibitions, workshops and roadshows in the Region of Crete's 2025 marketing and events calendar as it steps up its efforts to capitalize on the island's international appeal as a Tier 1 summer destination in the Eastern Mediterranean, with an annual tourism inflow of approximately 6.5 million. **Vice Governor for Tourism, Dr. Kyriakos Kotsoglou, Region of Crete**, said: "The Region of Crete actively supports the Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum, which will be held for the first time in Crete. With great joy and high expectations, we are preparing to host the forum, organized by the organizers of the most important maritime event in the world, Posidonia. The organization of the forum in Heraklion is part of the strategic plan of the Region of Crete for a strong, extroverted, sustainable and competitive tourism sector in Crete. The presence at the forum of dozens of cruise companies, specialized tourist agencies and organizations from all over the world constitutes a significant challenge for the further development of cruising on the island, contributing to the reduction of seasonality and the strengthening of Crete's tourism product. At the same time, highlighting the island's historical, cultural and environmental reserves to visitors from all over the world."

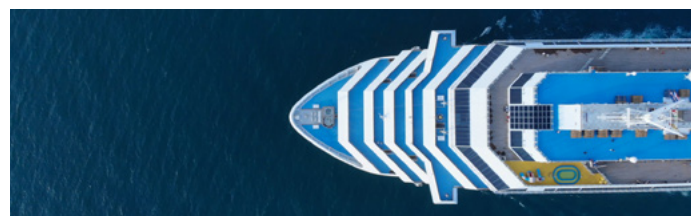
## NAVIGATOR TRAVEL TO SHOWCASE NEW CRUISE ITINERARIES AT POSIDONIA SEA TOURISM FORUM

**Navigator Travel**, the Athens-based GSA for leading cruise brands - including Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Azamara, and Silversea Cruises - is setting sail for Heraklion this spring to participate in the Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum for the eighth consecutive time. "The Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum remains the premier cruise-related event, consistently upholding the quality of excellence associated with the Posidonia brand," said **Andreas Stylianopoulos, President of Navigator Travel**. At this year's Forum, Navigator Travel will spotlight exciting new itineraries departing from Piraeus, featuring Royal Caribbean's Brilliance of the Seas, as well as Celebrity Cruises' Infinity, with sailings starting and ending in Piraeus. The event will serve as a key platform for Navigator Travel to connect with industry professionals and promote Greece as a top-tier cruise hub.



## PORT TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT APP ON DISPLAY AT PSTF

System Integrator **NBS** and ICT services provider **BEWISE** are bringing their consortium to PSTF for the second consecutive time, following their Thessaloniki debut two years ago, where they launched a PaaS application '**e.Berth marine allocation platform**'. "The massive increase in passengers/visitors and commercial traffic at Greek ports in recent years drives us to design and develop innovative technological solutions that optimize management, service, and security standards in a cost-effective manner," said **Menelaos Makrigiannis, Founder & CEO, BEWISE**. At PSTF 2025, the consortium will present its 'mature' product and the use cases they have already in place with Lavrio Port Authority and Rhodes Port Authority. **Aris Zias, General Manager, NBS**, said: "Our participation in and our main intention for PSTF 2025 is to present the latest version of our e.Berth port traffic management application and the additional features it can provide to port authorities and cruise stakeholders and operators."



## MARINE FINTECH COMES ONBOARD

**US Maritime Payment Solutions LLC** is making its PSTF debut this year, where it plans to showcase ShipMoney, an e-wallet and Visa branded payroll card program for seafarers. "The cruise business is a very important segment of our business, with numerous cruise and cruise-related clients," said **Stuart Ostrow, President**. "We are very excited to exhibit for the first time at the Posidonia Sea Tourism Forum this year. Our company is based in Miami, the cruise capital of the world, and we have been an active member of the cruise community from the day we launched ShipMoney."



## The Med: A Compelling Need for New Marquee Ports and Destinations

DAY 1 | Tuesday 6 May 2025

09:00-09:30 Morning coffee - Registration

09:30-10:10 Welcome messages

10:10-11:30 **The cruise industry: A culprit or a victim of the over-tourism debate?**

**Speakers:**

- Samuel Maubanc, Director General, **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Europe**
- Gianni Onorato, CEO, **MSC Cruises**
- Theodora Riga, President, **MedCruise** and **Corfu Port Authority SA**
- Chris Theofilides, CEO, **Celestyal**

**Moderator:** Grant Holmes, Global VP, **Cruise Solutions, Inchcape Shipping Services**

11:30-11:50 Networking coffee break for Speakers, Delegates and Press



11:50-13:10 **The future of cruise destination development**

**Speakers:**

- Lars Clasen, CEO, **Cruise Saudi**
- Marcus Puttich, Director, Destinations, **TUI Cruises**
- Ana Karina Santini, AVP, International Destination Development, **Royal Caribbean Group**
- Sandi Weir, Sr. Director, Global Government Relations & Public Affairs, **Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings**

13:10-14:10 Networking lunch for Speakers, Delegates and Press

14:10-14:20 **Region of Crete presentation**

**Presenter:** Kyriakos Kotsoglou, Vice Governor, Tourism, **Region of Crete**

14:25-15:45 **Small ship cruising: A different perspective**

**Speakers:**

- Spyros Almpertis, VP, Port and Destination Operations, Guest Port Services, **The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection**
- Alexander Bienek, VP, Marine Operations, **Star Clippers**
- Adria Bono, Director, Destination Experiences, **Crystal Cruises**
- Elisabetta De Nardo, VP, Port Development, **MSC Cruises-Explora Journeys**
- Filippos Venetopoulos, CEO, **Variety Cruises**

**Moderator:** Frances Gannon, Editor and co-founder, **CruiseTimes**

15:50-17:00 **Cruising towards sustainability: Partnering with destinations on the net zero pathways**

**Speakers:**

- Ioannis Anastasakis, VG, Climate Change and Urban Mobility, **Region of Crete**
- Ioannis Pappas, Director, Med Region & EU Sustainable Destinations, **GSTC**

**Moderator:** Julie Green, Deputy Director General, **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) Europe**



DAY 2 | Wednesday 7 May 2025

09:15-09:50 Morning coffee - Registration

09:50-10:00 Opening Statements

10:00-11:20 **Cruise ports: Can infrastructure keep up with demand?**

**Speakers:**

- Manolis Alevropoulos, VP, Marine Operations, **Celebrity Cruises | Royal Caribbean Group**
- Isabelle Côté, Management Consultant, International Terminal Operations, **Virgin Voyages**
- Aziz Güngör, Regional Director, East Med Ports, **Global Ports Holding**
- Minas Papadakis, CEO, **Heraklion Port Authority SA**
- Gianluca Suprani, SVP, **MSC Cruises**

**Moderator:** Nicky Guerrero, Secretary General, **MedCruise**

11:20-11:40 Networking coffee break for Speakers, Delegates and Press

## 11:40-13:00 Cruise lines & destinations: The need for an earnest dialogue Parallel session

- Speakers:**
- Ligia Balea, Product Manager, Shore Excursions, **Carnival Cruise Line**
  - Dimitris Bekos, Head of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and the UAE, **InterCruises**
  - Michele Bosco, Manager, Shore Excursions and Operations, **Princess Cruises**
  - Alessandro Carollo, AVP, Government Relations, **Royal Caribbean Group**
  - Thanos Pallis, Professor of Maritime & Port Economics, Department of Maritime Studies, **University of Piraeus**

**Moderator:** Nicky Guerrero, Secretary General, **MedCruise**

## 11:40-13:20 METAVASEA Port Safety Workshop Parallel session

**Speakers to be announced**

Organised by HELMEPA  
**metavasea**

## 13:00-14:00 Networking lunch for Speakers, Delegates and Press

## 14:00-15:15 Coastal & short sea shipping: Evolving towards a greener future Parallel session

- Speakers:**
- Manolis Koutoulakis, Secretary General for Insular Policy and Aegean, **Ministry of Maritime Affairs & Insular Policy**
  - Loukas Sigalas, CEO, **Minoan Lines**
  - Chrysanthi Stefanou, Managing Director, **Golden Star Ferries**
  - George Xiradakis, President, **Association of Banking and Financial Executives of Hellenic Shipping**, and Founder & Managing Director, **XRTC BUSINESS CONSULTANTS**

## 14:00-15:15 Yachting today looking at global challenges and its next phase Parallel session

- Speakers:**
- Stavros Katsikadis, President, **Greek Marinas Association**
  - Vasilis Korkidis, President, **Piraeus Chamber of Commerce & Industry**
  - Gina Polemi, Founder & Managing Director, **Regatta Plus** and President, **Hellenic Committee for Professional Yachting (HCPY)**
  - Stelios Sarafoglou, BoD-Captain Class A, **Hellenic Yacht Masters Club**

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## 15:15-16:30 YES to SEApping

- Speakers:**
- Maria Deligianni, Regional Director, Eastern Mediterranean, **Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA)**
  - Akis Konstantinidis, HR Manager, **Technomar**
  - George Koumpenas, COO, **Celestial** and President, **Hellenic Cruise Ship Owners and Associated Members' Union (EEKFN)**
  - Minas Papadakis, CEO, **Heraklion Port Authority SA**
  - Loukas Sigalas, CEO, **Minoan Lines**
  - Gregory Spourdalakis, Managing Director, **Columbia Shipmanagement Greece**

**Moderator:** Danae Bezantakou, CEO, **Navigator Shipping Consultants** and Founder, **YES Forum**

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## 15:15-16:30 She4Sea Workshop on Women in Blue Economy Parallel session

**Speakers to be announced**

For more information <https://she4seaproject.eu/>

Organised by HELMEPA



## DAY 3 | Thursday 8 May 2025

### 11:00-15:00 Fam trip: An unforgettable journey to Spinalonga island

Get to know a potential high-yield shore destination

Embark on a captivating journey that includes a guided tour through the unique ruined houses and buildings of the settlement that was, from 1903-1957, Greece's official leper colony. Spi-nalonga gained international recognition as the setting for Victoria Hislop's best-selling novel, "The Island" (2005).

#### Gastronomy Experience

Enjoy lunch at the new restaurant, because gastronomy is an essential part of the Hellenic Herit-age experience.

#### Important notes

1. Suggested for itinerary and shore excursion cruise executives.
2. Participation in the fam trip is included in the Speakers', Delegates' and Press' packages.
3. Due to limited seats available, you are kindly requested to register your interest [here](#)

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For more information about the panels please visit the Forum's [website](#)

SKY express is offering delegates, exhibitors and visitors a

**15%discount**

on fares to Heraklion when booking their tickets on [www.skyexpress.gr](http://www.skyexpress.gr) using promo code

**POSIDONIA2025**

Booking period: Until 05/05/2025

Passengers: 1-4

Fare types: sky joy+, sky enjoy, business class

Routes: Valid for all routes to/from Heraklion (including routes that transit in Athens).



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