

interview

Meeting innovators in the global cruise industry



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International Cruise Ship Industry

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Continuing our Q&As, ICSI talked with Ramon Hurtado, Global Product & Operations Manager at ground handling company, Intercruises Shoreside & Port Services.

Q: This is a very competitive market. How do you see yourselves gaining market share going forward?

A: We will continue to focus on delivering a consistently high quality of service in all destinations in which we operate, working closely with our cruise line partners to understand their needs and expectations, transforming them into reality - our business was built on this principle.

This includes analysing how the cruise industry is changing and its future growth, so we are looking at a number of key topics, such as the changing guest demographic, new destinations, digitalisation and sustainability.

For us, it is not about gaining more market share, but making the most of the market share we have. We remain committed to working closely with our cruise line partners to increase shore excursion (shorex) participation rates.

Q: Do you think there is a market with some of the newer cruise companies and ports who are new to cruising who may need turnkey projects, ie a complete service solution - a one stop shop?

A: This depends on to what extent of a complete service solution you mean. We have always considered ourselves a 'one-stop shop' for cruise call services for both established and newer cruise lines, offering turnaround, shore excursion, port operation and hotel programme services.

Furthermore, as a cruise ground handler, we are the intermediary between the ship and the shore, so we also work closely with ports on how to best to operate a cruise call.

Q: Are there any areas of the world where your port service portfolio could be marketed perhaps more than others?

A: We do not really market our services to specific regions, but focus on our cruise line clients and ensure that they are regularly updated with the services we offer and the growing ways we can support them. In the destinations, our local teams focus on forging mutually beneficial partnerships with the port, transportation companies, venues, attractions and various suppliers, as well as the local community.

Q: Some ports now cater for several 2,000 pax plus cruise ships almost every day. Is this becoming a logistical problem?

A: I want to emphasise that these operations are carried out in a very professional and efficient manner, prioritising safety and guest experience. All stakeholders are involved at a very advance planning stage, including the cruise line, port authorities,

ground handler, transportation companies, venues, attractions and local community/government.

This high level of collaboration and co-ordination enables us to operate multi-ship calls in a single destination on one day, while still respecting the local community and providing a memorable experience to cruise guests.

The cruise industry is growing and constantly evolving, which will inevitably mean new challenges along the way, but the industry is continually collaborating to find ways to overcome these challenges and ensure sustainability within the destinations.

For example, at Intercruises we are already diversifying our tour portfolio to help decentralise tourism in key destinations, working with alternative inner-city attractions or sites outside of the city. Additionally, we are now implementing our award-winning sustainable tour criteria, which means that we apply sustainable considerations into every aspect of product development.

Q: Is the general move towards digitalisation a help to the service sector in say agency, logistics, etc?

A: Digitalisation is inevitable in all sectors as a tool to enable people to deliver a better and more efficient service. At Intercruises, we are striving to implement digitalisation wherever we think it can support our teams.

We currently have a number of key projects to integrate digital tools in our service:

- SafeAshore: Award-winning system for guest and guide safety: <https://vimeo.com/232012315>
- I-ELP: Intercruises eLearning Platform – training resource on cruise industry standards for tour guides around the world
- ICDAM: Intercruises Digital Asset Management system - a cloud library of all Intercruises digital assets, which can be accessed by cruise lines to support their shorex promotional material.

Additionally, we are working closely with cruise lines on how we can utilise digitalisation and all technical improvements to streamline the immigration and embarkation processes during turnarounds.

Q: Embarkation/disembarkation is a bit 'hit or miss' in some places. How can Intercruises help smooth this operation?

A: The experience of our people. Even with new digital tools, better destination infrastructure and enhanced terminal design, you still need a team to bring all of those elements together through understanding the turnaround operation.

Our teams work with cruise lines and destination

stakeholders to plan the guest journey, from the moment they arrive in the turnaround destination, until the moment they leave. This includes transport to/from the port/airport, hotel accommodation, meet & greet and directional staff, luggage handling and the check-in process.

Every single detail counts - how we sort and store the luggage, how we park and load buses - every second that we save means a better experience for the guests and crew. Additionally, when handling large groups of people there will inevitably be the need to deal with unexpected situations and this is when the experience of our people is irreplaceable.

Q: In addition, some terminals are well designed, catering for all services, while others are not. Will you be looking at terminal design from a service throughput point of view?

A: Terminal design is not one of our services, but we do provide advice on how terminal design can support ground handling and port operation services.

When working in a new terminal, we will have various planning meetings with the port, terminal operator and cruise line to ensure the best possible service for cruise guests and the most efficient vessel operations.

We do the same for new ships, ensuring that we have meticulously planned an operation, especially inaugural calls. For example, we worked with a cruise line and port from day one during a very advanced and detailed planning operation that saw a new ship utilising two terminals simultaneously.

A cruise vacation is often a once-in-a-lifetime experience for guests and the service received from all stakeholders should be perfect from the first until the last call.

Q: There is also possibly a role on a consultancy basis to cruise ship operators and ports. Do you see this area as a growing business?

A: Yes, but we do not consider this as a separate service. Working with cruise lines and ports to ensure successful cruise calls is part of working in partnership and sharing knowledge to achieve our common goals.

Q: Will you tend to employ your own people to service a contract, or sub-contract as necessary, or a mixture of both?

A: In the majority of destinations, we employ our own people, but there are some destinations where we need to sub-contract. However all sub-contractors go through strict audits and training procedures, and will have one of our in-house team onsite during initial operations.

We have worked with some sub-contractors for over a decade and consider them colleagues and an integral part of our business.

Q: Will or have you become involved with any of the organisations, such as CLIA, MedCruise, etc?

A: Yes, we are very involved with different cruise associations. We work very closely with CLIA, often acting as the official logistics partner for their events. We also work closely with the Australian Cruise Association, MedCruise and CruiseBritain.

These associations allow us to strengthen our ties with the wider cruise community and provide a platform for stakeholders to discuss key topics within the industry.

Inter cruises invests in Dubrovnik catamaran

Inter cruises has bought a catamaran, which has been operating in Dubrovnik since early June, 2019.

Named 'SeaGULL 30', the catamaran was custom-built in 2019 in Perpignan, France, and has capacity for 80 guests and five crew, which is made up of experienced seafarers from Dubrovnik, including two Captains who are now working full time for Inter cruises.

In an effort to be more sustainable, the catamaran's sails are used as much as possible, with the engine only in operation when necessary.

There are currently seven shorex programmes operated on 'SeaGULL 30', highlights include:

- Guest pick up direct from the gangway.
- Dubrovnik Old Town cruise.
- Sailing to the nearby Lokrum or Elaphite islands.
- Swimming direct from the Catamaran, which is equipped with ladders.

"Our beautiful catamaran enables us to provide guests with a unique experience in Dubrovnik – something totally different from anything else that is currently available. The first shorex was in early June and since then the Catamaran is always operating at near full capacity.

"This investment shows Inter cruises' dedication and commitment to the destination and also to supporting cruise lines in diversifying the shorex portfolio to increase guest participation rates." explained Maro Saulovic, Inter cruises' National Manager Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, Serbia & Albania.

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