

# CRUISING FOR IMPACT

Fostering inclusive growth in port & coastal destinations through cruising





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## FOREWORD

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Travel & Tourism has long been a powerful engine of global growth, but its true value extends far beyond economic contribution. At its best, our sector creates opportunity, strengthens communities, and improves lives. This is particularly evident in the cruise industry—one of the fastest-growing segments of Travel & Tourism—which connects people and places while delivering tangible and lasting social impact.

As this report highlights, cruise tourism is already a significant force for inclusive growth. In 2024 alone, the industry supported 1.8 million jobs worldwide—over 1.4 million of them onshore—demonstrating its deep integration with local economies. For every 20 cruise passengers, one full-time job is supported, while more than 60% of travellers return to destinations they first discovered by cruise. These figures and the numbers from CLIA (Cruise Lines International Association) underscore a powerful reality: cruising is not only about journeys at sea, but about livelihoods, opportunity, and long-term value on land.

Understanding this broader contribution requires us to look beyond traditional metrics. Social impact—how tourism affects people’s lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing—is an essential measure of success. Cruise tourism plays a vital role here, particularly in coastal and island destinations where it can serve as a consistent source of income, investment, and resilience.

This report outlines seven key pillars through which cruise tourism delivers positive social outcomes: job creation and skills development; inclusive employment opportunities; community enrichment and entrepreneurship; cultural preservation and engagement; infrastructure and connectivity improvements; environmental solutions with social spillovers; and health, safety, and crisis response. Together, these pillars demonstrate how cruising contributes to more inclusive, connected, and resilient societies.

This report also shows many destinations actively seek cruise tourism, and where challenges arise, they are increasingly addressed through collaboration, smart policy, and innovation. From managing visitor flows to strengthening local supply chains, the industry is evolving with purpose.

Importantly, this report goes beyond analysis to offer a clear roadmap for the future. Its six recommendations—ranging from embedding cruise tourism in inclusive growth strategies, to strengthening community partnerships, aligning infrastructure with social value, expanding skills and employment pathways, improving impact measurement, and reframing cruising as a partner in social progress—provide practical guidance for governments, industry leaders, and communities alike.

Cruise tourism has a huge potential for growth and to be an even greater force for good. By working together, we can ensure that its growth continues to deliver meaningful, measurable benefits for people and places around the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gloria Guevara'.

**Gloria Guevara**  
President & CEO  
World Travel & Tourism Council

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The cruise industry supports inclusive growth and job creation globally, accounting for 1.8 million jobs in 2024, over 1.4 million of which are onshore; demonstrating its deep integration with local economies and communities.



Cultural heritage is not only preserved but brought to life through cruise experiences, from community-led excursions to festival revitalisation, reinforcing pride and identity among host communities.



For every 20 cruise passengers, one full-time job is supported globally; showcasing the direct connection between cruise travel and livelihoods in destinations worldwide.



Infrastructure investments spurred by cruising benefit residents and visitors alike, from digital signage and sanitation to accessibility improvements and universal design at terminals.



The industry is a driver of upward mobility, offering structured career progression for workers from over 150 countries, with employee retention of more than 80% and growing representation of women in leadership roles.



Environmental investments by cruise lines have measurable social spillovers and returns, with initiatives like shore power, coral restoration, and marine conservation improving public health and community resilience.



Cruise tourism acts as an accelerator for small businesses and entrepreneurs, channeling passenger spend directly into local markets and supporting vibrant tourism micro-economies.



The cruise industry contributes meaningfully to health and crisis responses, from delivering medical care at sea to deploying ships and support in times of disaster.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Cruise tourism is increasingly seen as a tool for equitable development, particularly in small island and coastal destinations, where it often represents a consistent source of income, demand and investment.



The cruise industry generates substantial local value, especially when smart policies link excursions, sourcing, and taxation to local enterprises and reinvestment in destination infrastructure.



With over 60% of passengers returning to destinations first visited by cruise ship, the industry not only connects communities to global travellers, but also builds long-term demand and legacy value.



The success of cruise tourism depends on thoughtful public policy. Smart investments in infrastructure, skills, and inclusive sourcing ensure cruising delivers long-term social value, not just short-term gains.



Despite common misconceptions, most destinations wish to welcome more visitors, not fewer. Proactive collaboration between cruise lines and local governments shows how concerns around overcrowding can be successfully addressed while preserving economic benefits.



Framing cruising within national development strategies, as a contributor to skills development, cultural preservation, and infrastructure access, unlocks its full potential as a force for inclusive and sustainable growth.

# INTRODUCTION

## TRAVEL & TOURISM'S GLOBAL IMPACT

Travel & Tourism is one of the most powerful engines for global economic and social progress, contributing 10% to global GDP and supporting 1 in 10 jobs around the world<sup>1</sup>. Beyond these headline figures, the sector plays a transformative role in lifting communities, creating opportunities, and enriching lives across geographies, from megacities to remote islands.



Within this vibrant Travel & Tourism ecosystem, cruise tourism is one of its fastest-growing segments; connecting travellers with communities across the world through immersive, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. With passenger capacity projected to rise by 19% between 2022 and 2028<sup>2</sup>, the cruise industry is not only rebounding, but accelerating its contribution to global prosperity. In 2024, 34.6 million cruise passengers set sail, exceeding pre-pandemic levels<sup>3</sup>, in turn sustaining 1.8 million jobs and US\$ 60.1 billion in wages<sup>4</sup>. Notably, approximately 1.4 million of these jobs were linked to onshore activities<sup>5</sup>, demonstrating how cruising drives local employment in coastal and port communities.



Beyond its immediate economic contributions, cruise tourism is a force for broader social impact. **In 2024, direct cruise-related spending reached US\$93 billion<sup>6</sup>**. Importantly, for every 20 cruise passengers, one full-time job is supported globally<sup>7</sup>. In addition, more than 60% of cruise travellers report returning to destinations they first discovered via cruise<sup>8</sup>, demonstrating the long-term tourism value the industry creates.

Cruising is also an enabler of diversity, entrepreneurship, and inclusive growth. From supporting small businesses and heritage preservation to fostering inclusion and diversity, the cruise industry's impact reaches far beyond the ship. Like Travel & Tourism more broadly, it plays a unique role in unlocking social mobility and cultural exchange.

As Travel & Tourism is forecast to have reached a record US\$2.1 trillion in international visitor spending in 2025<sup>9</sup>, the cruise industry has an opportunity to further embed itself as a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable growth. This report explores how the cruise industry contributes to positive social outcomes worldwide, and how destinations can amplify the benefits for their local communities and visitors alike.

## FRAMING THE NARRATIVE: WHY SOCIAL IMPACT MATTERS

As one of the world's largest economic sectors<sup>10</sup>, Travel & Tourism has long been recognised for its power to drive growth, investment and job creation. Yet, its true value cannot be fully understood through the lens of GDP contributions alone. Social impact, which accounts for the effect of tourism on the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of individuals and communities, is an equally critical measure of success<sup>11</sup>.

### WHAT SOCIAL IMPACT ENCOMPASSES

In the context of Travel & Tourism, social impact encompasses a wide spectrum of outcomes. It includes, among others, the creation of employment, the stimulation of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as the enhancement of community infrastructure, health, education, and cultural preservation<sup>12 13</sup>. Critically, it reflects whether the benefits of tourism reach beyond corporate balance sheets and into the daily lives of people; particularly in destinations where opportunities may be limited. For local communities, a thriving tourism sector can mean upward mobility, increased access to services, and a renewed sense of pride.

For governments, the broader tourism sector can act as a tool to reduce inequality and poverty, revitalise rural and underdeveloped areas, and foster inclusive development.

### ROLE IN POVERTY REDUCTION

Indeed, cruise tourism is particularly relevant in this context, as it brings consistent spending and job creation to underserved regions; often acting as a vital economic lifeline in port towns with limited alternative industries. In the Bahamas, for instance, cruise tourism generated US\$ 655 million in direct expenditure during the 2023–2024 cruise year, supporting 7,400 direct jobs and nearly 14,000 jobs overall. These income flows help reduce poverty by expanding household earning capacity, improving access to services, and creating long-term employment in communities where economic opportunities are otherwise constrained.



**US\$ 655M**

Bahamas cruise tourism, direct expenditure (2023-24)

# FRAMING THE NARRATIVE: WHY SOCIAL IMPACT MATTERS

## MEASURING SOCIAL VALUE

Measuring and communicating this social value is no longer optional. Indeed, destinations, investors, and consumers alike are more carefully considering who benefits from tourism growth and how tourism can be an even greater force for good, not just for visitors but for the local communities.

## CRUISING'S MULTI-DIMENSIONAL IMPACT

In the context of cruising, social impact is both far-reaching and multi-dimensional. While the industry can be celebrated for its substantial economic footprint, with US\$98.5 billion in GDP contribution to the global economy, and \$199 billion in total economic output in 2024<sup>14</sup>, the ripple effects onshore tell a richer story. In effect, each ship arrival supports a complex web of local suppliers, transport operators, hospitality workers, cultural providers, and small businesses<sup>15</sup>. Shore excursions create opportunities for artisans, food vendors, guides, and performers; many of whom rely heavily on the visitor economy<sup>16</sup>. In port communities, especially in small island and coastal developing states, cruise tourism often represents one of the few consistent sources of income and investment<sup>17</sup>.



**US\$ 98.5B**

Global economic contribution of the cruise industry (2024)



**US\$ 199B**

Total economic output (2024)

## REALISING THE POTENTIAL

Yet realising this potential requires deliberate action. From investing in infrastructure that benefits both locals and visitors, to sourcing locally and designing more immersive, low-impact excursions; cruise lines and destinations alike have the opportunity to collaborate and elevate their social footprint. Indeed, this is not just about impact; it is about legacy.

## ALIGNED WITH BROADER TRENDS

These dynamics are aligned with the broader trends shaping both Travel & Tourism and the cruise industry. Travellers, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, are increasingly motivated by purpose and authenticity<sup>18</sup>, seeking experiences that contribute meaningfully to the places they visit<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, governments and industry leaders are prioritising social equity, sustainable development, and resilient communities. As demand grows, so do expectations: for more responsible tourism, for inclusive growth, and for value that endures beyond a single visit.

In this landscape, framing cruise tourism through a social impact lens is more than a narrative shift; it is a strategic imperative.

# THE PILLARS OF SOCIAL IMPACT

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## SHAPING INCLUSIVITY, RESILIENCE & CONNECTION

The positive social impact of cruise tourism is both multidimensional and measurable. From the creation of skilled jobs to the preservation of cultural heritage, cruising generates tangible benefits which enhance the livelihoods of people and communities across the globe.

To better understand these dynamics, this section explores seven core pillars through which cruise lines and destinations are helping to shape more inclusive, resilient, and connected societies. Each pillar highlights tangible examples of positive outcomes already being delivered; and showcases the greater potential yet to be unlocked.

- 1 JOB CREATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**
- 2 INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**
- 3 COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT & SUPPORT OF ENTREPRENEURS**
- 4 CULTURAL PRESERVATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**
- 5 INFRASTRUCTURE, CONNECTIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS**
- 6 ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS WITH SOCIAL SPILLOVERS**
- 7 HEALTH, SAFETY & CRISIS RESPONSE**



## JOB CREATION & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AT SEA AND ON SHORE

Cruise tourism is a powerful enabler of employment and skills development, offering a diverse array of opportunities both at sea and on shore. In 2024, the global cruise industry supported 1.8 million jobs, with over 1.4 million attributable to onshore activity alone. These jobs span a broad spectrum, from port logistics and tour operations to transportation, hospitality, and maritime careers, creating a web of economic activity that connects communities to the global visitor economy.



**1.8M**

Global jobs in 2024

### ONBOARD CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Onboard, cruise lines employ around 300,000 seafarers from more than 150 countries, working across 450 job types<sup>20</sup>. The employee retention rate in the cruise industry, which is upwards of 80%, is a testament to the opportunities the cruising industry provides<sup>21</sup>, reflecting strong career progression, competitive wages, and high job satisfaction. The industry has effectively developed structured pathways and in-house training programmes that support entry-level crew as they rise through the ranks to leadership roles, while partnerships with maritime academies across the Philippines, India, and Africa open doors for aspiring professionals<sup>22</sup>. What is more, a growing

number of senior officers, including captains, began their careers as cadets or stewards, showcasing the incredible upward mobility within cruising. Cruise lines are also investing in next-generation skills. From digital tools to green technologies, seafarers are increasingly being trained in AI applications, waste reduction, and sustainable fuel management as the industry transitions toward net-zero emissions by 2050<sup>23</sup>.



**80%+**

Employee retention

### ONSHORE EMPLOYMENT FOOTPRINT

On land, the employment footprint is equally strong. In Sydney, Australia, Brent Street Performing Arts Centre<sup>24</sup> has seen thousands of alumni launch global entertainment careers via cruise contracts. In port destinations, targeted guide certification programmes and hospitality training initiatives help local residents access formal employment in tourism.

Through these efforts, the cruise industry is not only generating jobs, it is nurturing lifelong careers, expanding access for underrepresented groups, and creating skillsets that are transferable across sectors and borders.

## INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

### A MULTICULTURAL ECOSYSTEM

With crew and staff representing over 150 nationalities, the cruise industry operates as a truly multicultural ecosystem<sup>25</sup>; offering a rare model of inclusive employment and making it uniquely positioned to advance diversity, equity and inclusion.



150+

Nationalities represented

### WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN CRUISING

The cruising industry is leading the way in supporting women's empowerment. In 2023, 94% of women seafarers were employed in cruising, with over 50% of women in the cruise industry holding mid-level positions or higher, and close to 40% of senior leadership roles in cruise companies held by women<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, leadership pathways are opening rapidly, with women now serving as captains, staff officers, and department heads across major cruise brands<sup>27</sup>.



~40%

Senior leadership held by women

### YOUTH AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

In parallel, targeted recruitment and scholarship programmes, often in partnership with maritime academies, continue to create entry points for young professionals from historically underrepresented regions, including Africa, South Asia, and the Caribbean<sup>28</sup>. While precise data on

youth employment is limited, the cruise industry is a recognised career launchpad, offering thousands of young people their first professional experience at sea across entertainment, hospitality, and technical departments.

### INCLUSIVE CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Cruise lines are also embedding inclusivity and diversity principles into product design and workforce policies. MSC Cruises, for example, has prioritised internal mobility and inclusive career development, enabling talent from diverse backgrounds to rise across departments<sup>29</sup>. This includes programmes such as cross-training and performance-based promotion, with a strong focus on cultural inclusion. Another example is Royal Caribbean Group's "Autism Friendly" initiative<sup>30</sup> which equips youth staff with specialised training to support people living with developmental challenges and their families. Several cruise companies also offer inclusive cultural programmes and LGBTQ+ safe spaces onboard<sup>31</sup>, reinforcing a culture of belonging both for crew and passengers.

As the cruise industry expands into new markets, it carries with it a powerful message: cruising is a driver of equity and empowerment. From the engine room to the captain's bridge, and from backstage to the boardroom, cruising enables individuals, regardless of gender or background, to build meaningful careers and shape the stories of tomorrow's travel.

## COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT & SUPPORT OF ENTREPRENEURS

### LINKING GLOBAL DEMAND WITH LOCAL INNOVATION

Cruise tourism provides a unique platform for community enrichment, poverty reduction and entrepreneurial growth, linking global demand with local innovation. By collaborating with small businesses, artisans, and tourism startups, cruise lines help channel visitor spending directly into the hands of local entrepreneurs; in turn transforming individual livelihoods and strengthening community resilience.

This impact is particularly evident in destinations such as Juneau, Alaska, where in 2023, nearly 1.7 million cruise passengers and 36,000 crew members generated over US\$ 375 million in direct spending. The influx supported 3,850 local jobs across retail, tours, and services, demonstrating how concentrated cruise visitation can bring about vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystems in small communities<sup>32</sup>.



**US\$ 375M+**

Direct cruise spending in Juneau (2023)

### SUPPORTING LOCAL ENTERPRISE

Beyond general spending, cruise lines are also investing in structured support for local enterprises. In Nassau, The Bahamas, Royal Caribbean partnered with the Tourism Development Corporation to launch a small business incubation hub. The initiative provides mentoring, seed capital, and access to cruise procurement chains; empowering dozens of local entrepreneurs to participate meaningfully in the visitor economy<sup>33</sup>.

Similar benefits are evident in St. Lucia. In towns like Castries and Soufrière, cruise arrivals provide steady foot traffic

that sustains vendors, guides, and micro-entrepreneurs; offering a reliable alternative to informal work and seasonal income. For many low-income families, cruise tourism has become a vital pathway to economic stability.

### THE BROADER ECONOMIC MULTIPLIER

The broader structure of the Travel & Tourism sector reinforces this potential. Indeed, small and medium-sized enterprises account for 80% of the sector, underscoring its role as fertile ground for innovation and inclusive growth.

Notably, Travel & Tourism enriches people at a faster rate than the global economy<sup>34</sup>. Its benefits stretch far beyond GDP and direct employment, linking into agriculture, arts, construction, and retail. In effect, for every US\$1 in direct GDP, more than US\$2 is generated through indirect and induced effects<sup>35</sup>.

As cruise arrivals continue to grow, so too does the potential to harness this momentum for inclusive economic empowerment. With the right enablers, such as marketplaces, grants, training, and curated excursions, cruise tourism can serve as a launchpad for vibrant community enterprise. These efforts not only enhance the visitor experience but ensure prosperity flows deep into the fabric of the places visited.

## CULTURAL PRESERVATION & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### HERITAGE-BASED EXCURSIONS

The cruise industry has the ability to play a meaningful role in preserving cultural heritage and fostering community engagement by creating opportunities to share local traditions, cuisine, crafts, and stories with a global audience. These experiences not only enrich the visitor journey but also strengthen cultural identity, whilst generating direct economic benefits for the host communities and destination.

Across the globe, cruise itineraries are increasingly designed to include heritage-based excursions, from UNESCO-listed sites to cultural landscapes.

In Montenegro, for instance, collaborative efforts between cruise operators, the National Tourism Organisation, and UNESCO aim to better manage visitor flows to Kotor<sup>39</sup>, a medieval town and World Heritage site.

The revenue generated from port calls contributed to site restoration and museum development, while community-run walking tours offer authentic storytelling led by local historians.

### CELEBRATING CULTURE

Another example is that of Papua New Guinea, where cruise visits have supported the revitalisation of the Alotau Canoe and Kundu Festival, providing reliable income for artisans, musicians, and dancers<sup>36</sup>. Meanwhile, in the Pacific Islands, the South Pacific Tourism Organisation partnered with cruise lines to safeguard cultural protocols<sup>37</sup> in village visits, ensuring traditions are respected, and host communities retain control over the visitor experience.

### COMMUNITY CO-CREATION

Community co-creation is also at the heart of Belize's Garifuna excursions<sup>38</sup>, where local guides lead immersive drumming sessions, traditional cooking classes, and language preservation tours. These initiatives offer dignified employment while preserving intangible heritage for future generations.

Across the industry, cruise lines frequently partner with local operators, many of whom are deeply embedded in community life to deliver authentic experiences and economic benefits at port destinations. Through such collaborations, cruise tourism can go beyond observation, becoming a platform for empowerment and cultural continuity.



## INFRASTRUCTURE, CONNECTIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

### CATALYST FOR CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Cruise tourism often serves as a catalyst for critical infrastructure and broader connectivity upgrades that benefit both visitors and residents alike. As port destinations expand their capacity to accommodate rising cruise arrivals, they frequently invest in port infrastructure as well as essential services including roads, sanitation, signage, and digital connectivity; which in turn improves quality of life and fosters broader economic development.

Nowhere is this more evident than in cruise homeports, where the need to accommodate large volumes of passengers has led to substantial upgrades in air, road, and public transport networks<sup>40</sup>. In Miami, the largest cruise homeport in the USA and Caribbean and one of the busiest ports in the world<sup>41</sup>, cruise activity has spurred the expansion of Miami International Airport, enhanced road and transit links to PortMiami, and fueled investment in hospitality, retail, and urban infrastructure. These developments have significantly improved regional and international connectivity, not only for cruise passengers but also for residents, businesses, and the broader economy.

### EXPANDING CONNECTIVITY

As more destinations position themselves as homeports or marquee ports, cruise tourism is helping unlock new air routes, extend domestic transport links, and justify high-capacity infrastructure that might otherwise be unviable.

This multiplier effect benefits the wider population by increasing travel options, reducing transportation costs, and enhancing overall accessibility, especially in areas previously underserved by regular transport services.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, a public-private partnership between Global Ports Holding and the Puerto Rico Ports Authority has committed over US\$42 million to modernise the Panamerican Piers<sup>42</sup>. This redevelopment aims to improve safety standards, streamline port operations and prepare the terminal to accommodate the newest generation of cruise ships; in turn strengthening Puerto Rico's role as a regional hub.

### DIGITAL INNOVATION

Digital innovation has also been spurred by cruise activity. In Alaska, smart port projects in Skagway and Juneau, both heavily reliant on cruise tourism, have introduced real-time digital signage, free public Wi-Fi, and wayfinding tools that support cruise passenger flows while improving digital access for residents in these remote towns<sup>43</sup>.

### ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

Cruise-related infrastructure development is also increasingly prioritising accessibility and inclusion. In Lisbon, Portugal, the city's modern cruise terminal was designed with universal accessibility principles, featuring tactile pathways, low-gradient ramps, and audible signage; making it one of the most inclusive public buildings in the country<sup>44</sup>. In St. Kitts, accessible minivans and dock ramps introduced for cruise passengers with mobility challenges have become a permanent fixture, enhancing community-wide access<sup>45</sup>.

Through these enhancements, cruise tourism does more than support visitor experience, it strengthens physical, digital, and social connectivity and infrastructure in ways that benefit entire communities, creating a lasting legacy of social value long after the ships have sailed.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS WITH SOCIAL SPILLOVERS

### CLEAN ENERGY INVESTMENTS

The cruise industry's growing commitment to environmental sustainability is generating significant social benefits in port communities around the world. Investments in clean energy, community-led conservation, and sustainable coastal programmes are not only protecting ecosystems, but also fostering healthier, more resilient communities for future generations.

A notable advancement is the adoption of onshore power supply (OPS) systems, which allow ships to shut down their engines while docked and connect to local electrical grids. This technology can reduce emissions by up to 98%, in turn, significantly improving air quality in port cities and delivering measurable public health benefits<sup>49</sup>.

### COMMUNITY-LED CONSERVATION

Cruise lines are also supporting community-led conservation efforts. In Australia, for instance, Coral Expeditions offers citizen science-themed voyages on the Great Barrier Reef, engaging guests in activities such as species surveys and contributing to initiatives like Coral Watch. These programmes

promote environmental stewardship while empowering local communities through education and participation<sup>46</sup>.

Another example is that of the Galápagos Islands, where the Lindblad Expeditions–National Geographic Fund supports local marine research and species monitoring through every voyage<sup>47</sup>. Partnering with conservation NGOs and local authorities, the programme supports sustainable fisheries and coral restoration; advancing both biodiversity protection and local livelihoods.

### COASTAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES

Cruise tourism revenues are also funding coastal protection initiatives. In the Bahamas, MSC Cruises converted an industrial site into a solar-powered marine reserve free of single-use plastics, fostering marine conservation while creating new opportunities for community development<sup>48</sup>.

Effectively, environmental action becomes a catalyst for social progress. By aligning green investments with local priorities, the cruise industry continues to demonstrate how sustainability can enhance public health, empower communities, and strengthen the future of coastal destinations.



## HEALTH, SAFETY & CRISIS RESPONSE

### ADVANCING GLOBAL HEALTH STANDARDS

The cruise industry plays a vital role in advancing global standards for health, safety, emergency preparedness and response, both onboard and across the port communities it serves<sup>50</sup>. As mobile, self-contained environments, cruise ships adhere to stringent international health protocols<sup>51</sup>. These protocols have in fact, in many cases, informed broader public health preparedness and response efforts, particularly in coastal and small island destinations.

### PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS

Cruise lines have built extensive partnerships with local health authorities, clinics, and emergency services to coordinate response plans and share training. From onboard medical teams equipped to handle complex care, to joint drills with port-based responders, the industry's preparedness has spillover benefits for entire regions. In effect, cruise ship medical centres treat a wide variety of illnesses and injuries, with approximately 95% of acute cases managed onboard, reducing the burden on local healthcare systems<sup>52</sup>.

### FRONTLINE CONTRIBUTORS IN CRISIS

Cruise lines are also frontline contributors in times of crisis. For instance, when Hurricane Dorian devastated the northern Bahamas in 2019<sup>53</sup>, cruise operators, including Carnival, Royal Caribbean, and MSC, delivered thousands of meals, evacuated residents, and provided logistical support for NGOs.

Similarly, in the aftermath of the 2021 earthquake in Haiti, ships were mobilised to deliver relief supplies and support aid distribution<sup>54</sup>. Additionally, cruise ships have been chartered to provide emergency housing and services during disasters, such as the six-month Hurricane Katrina relief mission in the Gulf of Mexico in 2005<sup>55</sup>.

### HUMANITARIAN FOOTPRINT

The industry's long-standing partnership with Mercy Ships, a global NGO operating hospital ships in West Africa, further illustrates cruising's humanitarian footprint. In 2024 alone, Mercy Ships performed 4,746 surgeries, 13,312 dental procedures, and trained over 900 local healthcare professionals through residencies, fellowships, and rotations<sup>56</sup>. Members of the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) support Mercy Ships by providing crew volunteers, equipment, and technical expertise to support surgeries, healthcare training, and life-saving care in regions with limited medical access<sup>57</sup>.

These examples highlight that the cruise industry is not only a beneficiary of healthy, safe communities, but also a committed contributor.

Through investment, collaboration, and rapid mobilisation during emergencies, the industry supports health security and resilience far beyond the confines of the ship.

# ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS

## PUBLIC NARRATIVES VERSUS REALITY

While cruise tourism continues to deliver substantial economic and social benefits to destinations around the world, public narratives, including in the media, often spotlight its perceived challenges. Headlines tend to focus on concerns such as overcrowding, economic leakage, or labour practices. While important, they can at times paint an incomplete picture of the industry's broader impact<sup>58</sup>. These narratives, often based on isolated or high-profile cases, risk overshadowing the more widespread reality: that in many destinations, cruise tourism is welcomed and actively sought as a driver of opportunity, investment, and community development.

In effect, the cruise industry is not only aware of its potential impacts but is proactively working to address them. It is committed to ensuring that its growth is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable. Where challenges exist, whether environmental, economic, or social, the industry is increasingly collaborating with governments, destinations, and community stakeholders to co-create thoughtful solutions<sup>59</sup>. This reflects a shared ambition: to make cruising a win–win–win proposition for destinations, their residents, and the industry itself.

- 1 REFRAMING THE OVERCROWDING NARRATIVE**
- 2 MAXIMISING LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACT**
- 3 EMPOWERING GLOBAL TALENT THROUGH MARITIME CAREERS**
- 4 AN INDUSTRY EVOLVING WITH PURPOSE**



## REFRAMING THE OVERCROWDING NARRATIVE

### THE CONTEXT: GLOBAL TOURISM CONCENTRATION

The issue of “overcrowding” often dominates discussions around cruise travel. Yet, it is essential to place these concerns in context. Globally, 80% of tourists visit just 10% of the world’s destinations<sup>60</sup>; with heavy concentration in a handful of “bucket list” cities like London, which captures over 50% of inbound visitors to UK<sup>61</sup>.

### BEYOND HIGH-PROFILE CASES

Within this broader trend, while a few high-profile destinations such as Venice, Barcelona, and Amsterdam have become synonymous with overcrowding<sup>62</sup>, they are not representative of the cruise industry’s global footprint. In reality, the vast majority of destinations around the world seek to attract more visitors<sup>63</sup>. In this context, cruise tourism offers a valuable opportunity to connect emerging destinations to the global travel economy, helping to disperse tourism benefits beyond traditional urban gateways<sup>64</sup>.

### COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

Where congestion has posed a challenge, the industry continues to strive to proactively collaborate with the local government and the destination itself to jointly respond with innovative destination management solutions.

For instance, in Dubrovnik, Croatia, a city once under pressure from cruise ship arrivals, the “Respect the City” initiative introduced scheduling caps, staggered ship arrivals, and real-time visitor monitoring<sup>67</sup>. Between 2019 and 2023, peak-time foot traffic in the Old Town decreased by 13%, while cruise-related economic benefits were preserved.

Similar measures are now being considered by other destinations seeking to balance preservation with prosperity. Another example is that of Juneau, Alaska, where voluntary agreements between the city and CLIA member lines now limit ship calls to five per day, protecting quality of life for residents while supporting a cruise industry that injects nearly US\$375 million annually into the local economy<sup>65 66</sup>.

These examples illustrate how, with collaborative governance and data-driven planning, the challenge of overcrowding can be not only mitigated, but transformed into a model for sustainable destination stewardship.

## MAXIMISING LOCAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

### DEBUNKING ECONOMIC LEAKAGE

One persistent misconception is that the economic benefits of cruising “leak” out of local economies and are captured primarily by the cruise lines themselves. While cruising, like all global industries, has complex supply chains, evidence suggests a strong and growing local impact; especially when proactive linkages are made with small and medium-sized enterprises<sup>68 69</sup>.

According to CLIA, cruise tourists spend on average more than €400 per passenger at the embarkation port and at least €100 per person at each port visited along the itinerary<sup>72</sup>. These expenditures support a wide range of local services, from guided tours and dining to transportation and retail. Moreover, port calls drive broader indirect benefits through port fees, provisioning, and crew-related spending<sup>73</sup>.

### THE HOMEPORTING ADVANTAGE

Notably, homeporting, when a cruise begins or ends in a destination, offers an even more significant economic opportunity for the destination. Indeed, beyond standard port day spend, homeport cities benefit from pre- and post-cruise hotel stays, airport transfers, restaurant visits, and retail purchases. This amplified local spend not only supports tourism businesses, but also creates stable jobs in transportation, logistics, and hospitality.

### LOCAL SUCCESS STORIES

In the Canary Islands, for instance, regional authorities collaborated with cruise operators to design “Local Flavours” shore excursions featuring artisans, local gastronomy, and community-led cultural experiences. This initiative led to a 28% increase in per-passenger onshore spend in Tenerife in 2023 and directly supported more than 3,000 jobs across the archipelago<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, in Barbados, more than 60% of cruise excursions are operated by local businesses, contributing an estimated US\$120 million in annual direct spend and sustaining over 13,000 tourism-related jobs<sup>71</sup>.

These examples showcase how smart policy, product curation, and partnership can significantly reduce economic leakage and ensure that cruising remains a powerful engine for inclusive local development.

## EMPOWERING GLOBAL TALENT THROUGH MARITIME CAREERS

### MORE THAN JOB GENERATION

Cruising is not only a job generator, but also a launchpad for lifelong careers. Often underrepresented are the stories of personal and professional growth that unfold onboard; where crew members from over 150 nationalities work, learn, and build futures for themselves and their families<sup>74</sup>.

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS

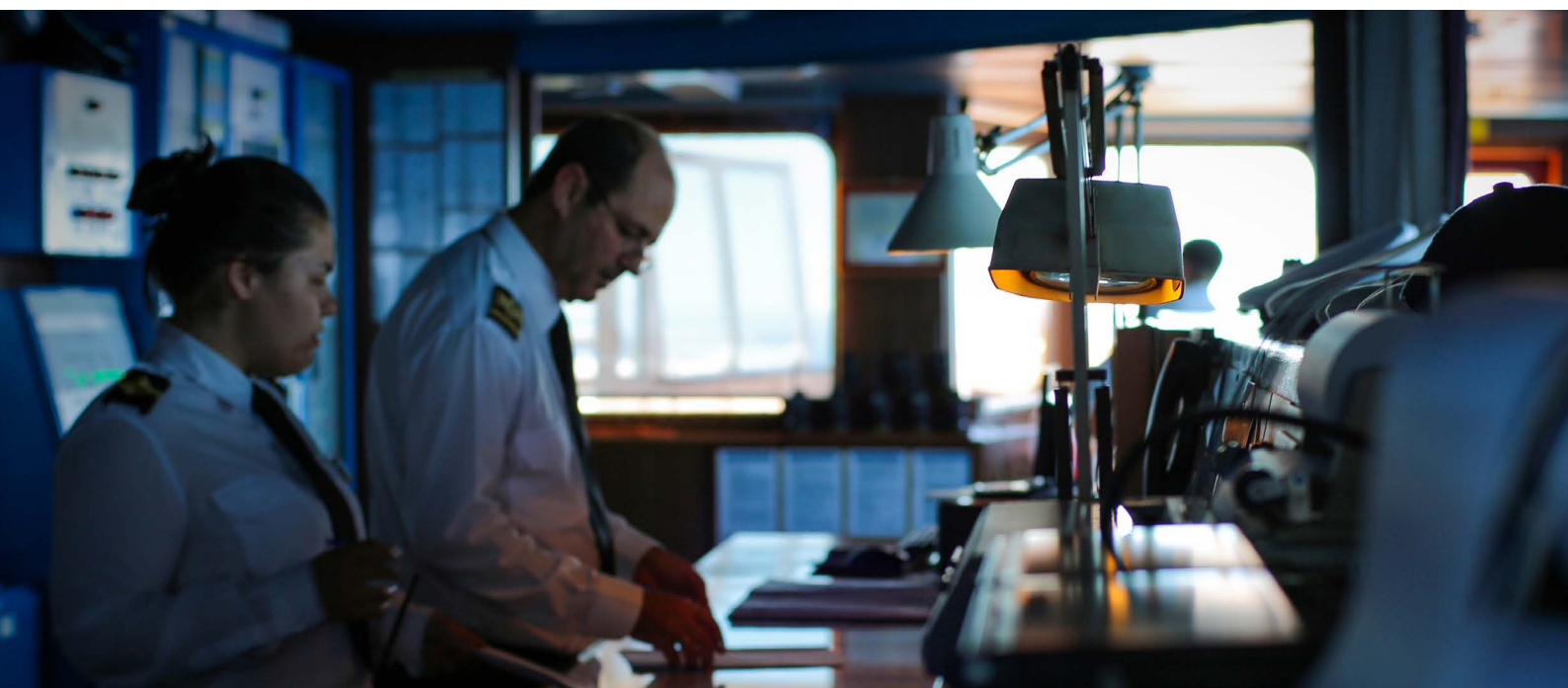
Many cruise lines offer structured career development pathways, including accredited training programmes, leadership development, and cross-cultural team-building. Maritime academies in the Philippines<sup>75</sup>, Indonesia, India, and South Africa, often co-funded by cruise companies, have provided opportunities to thousands to access employment in the industry, many of whom go on to supervisory and managerial roles.

### RIPPLE EFFECTS ACROSS COMMUNITIES

A career in cruise not only offers above-average earning potential compared to domestic service jobs in many countries, but also provides a unique opportunity to travel the world, develop intercultural skills, and support families back home. Cruising jobs create ripple effects across communities, boosting education, healthcare, and household stability.

### STRONG INTERNATIONAL PROTECTIONS

Backed by strong international regulations such as the Maritime Labour Convention 2006<sup>76</sup>, which sets minimum standards for wages, working hours, health, and safety, cruising provides millions of people around the world with a reliable path to professional growth and upward mobility.



## AN INDUSTRY EVOLVING WITH PURPOSE

### A SECTOR IN TRANSFORMATION

The cruise industry has undergone a significant transformation in recent years, technologically, environmentally, and socially; with a growing focus on aligning its growth with broader destination and community wellbeing. Yet to fully realise this transformation, continued public-private-community collaboration is essential.

### THE ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

Governments play a critical role in setting smart policies that enable cruise tourism to flourish. At the same time, the industry must continue to uphold high standards of accountability and transparency, from environmental stewardship to community engagement. But advancing this shared vision also requires balanced storytelling; one that reflects both the challenges and the progress underway.

### THE POWER OF BALANCED STORYTELLING

Media has a powerful role to play in shaping public understanding.

While stories of overcrowding or disruption deserve attention, it is equally important to spotlight the examples of innovation, collaboration, and positive social impact emerging across the sector.

By working together, stakeholders can ensure that cruise tourism maximises its potential as an engine of shared prosperity, enriching lives, enhancing destinations, and helping more people discover the world in a responsible and meaningful way.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## KEY AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

Cruise tourism holds significant potential as a driver of inclusive growth, local empowerment, and sustainable development. Indeed, when supported by thoughtful policy, strategic investment, and strong community partnerships, cruising can serve as a meaningful catalyst for shared prosperity.

The following recommendations outline key areas of opportunity for key stakeholders to amplify the positive social outcomes of cruise tourism whilst putting people, places and partnerships at the centre. Each is framed around collaboration, with the goal of aligning the growth of the cruise industry with long-term national development priorities, in turn ensuring enduring social value.

- 1 POSITION CRUISE TOURISM WITHIN BROADER INCLUSIVE GROWTH STRATEGIES**
- 2 STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP & CO-CREATION**
- 3 ALIGN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS WITH SOCIAL VALUE**
- 4 EXPAND ACCESS TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS**
- 5 ENHANCE MONITORING OF SOCIAL IMPACT & PROMOTE SHARED LEARNING**
- 6 REFRAME CRUISING AS A PARTNER IN SOCIAL PROGRESS**



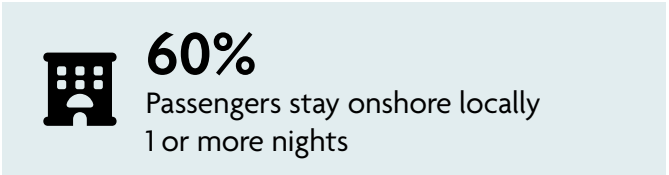
# POSITION CRUISE TOURISM WITHIN BROADER INCLUSIVE GROWTH STRATEGIES

## INTEGRATING CRUISE TOURISM INTO DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS

Cruising should be recognised, not only for its global economic impact, which amounted to US\$98 billion in GDP contribution and 1.8 million jobs in 2024, but also for its ability to deliver targeted, inclusive local benefits. In this context, there is a unique opportunity to integrate cruise tourism more fully into national and regional development agendas; particularly for destinations focused on job creation, entrepreneurship, and regional revitalisation. Indeed, given its strong local footprint, cruise tourism is well placed to meaningfully contribute to inclusive economic participation when small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), women-led businesses, youth, and underrepresented groups are supported to engage in the cruise value chain.

## THE POWER OF “BUY LOCAL, SOURCE LOCAL”

A cornerstone of this local impact is “buy local, source local.” Indeed, both passengers and cruise lines increasingly seek locally produced goods and services. Passengers are eager to purchase local crafts, food, and cultural experiences, while cruise operators are actively working to source fresh produce, seafood, and artisanal products from nearby communities. Research from CLIA highlights that the cruise industry sources a significant portion of its on-board and on-shore supplies locally, with around 70% of its economic impact returning directly to local communities<sup>77</sup>. Moreover, 69% of passengers stay locally one or more nights before or after their cruise, contributing to hotel, restaurant, and transport revenues<sup>78</sup>.



## AMPLIFYING LOCAL IMPACT

To further amplify this impact, there is an opportunity to deepen local sourcing within cruise procurement systems by easing market entry for small vendors and creating business incubation spaces near cruise terminals. Together, government and industry stakeholders could also co-develop inclusive sourcing guidelines and vendor training programmes. These steps would help build equitable value chains and ensure that cruise tourism continues to support sustained, community-centred growth.

In many destinations, this type of inclusive growth is already taking shape, where cruise activity supports local enterprise, strengthens linkages with agriculture and crafts, and provides a consistent source of demand in otherwise seasonal economies. With the right policy frameworks and public-private-community partnerships, this approach can be scaled to generate even broader social and economic benefits across the globe.

## STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP & CO-CREATION

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### COMMUNITIES AT THE HEART

Local communities need to be at the heart of cruise tourism; this requires collaborative destination stewardship rather than simply transactional port calls.

Cruise tourism has the ability to create richer experiences and more meaningful outcomes when communities are actively involved in shaping how tourism is delivered.

As such, establishing consistent consultation and co-creation mechanisms can help align product development with local culture, values, and aspirations.

### COMMUNITY-BASED EXCURSIONS

Many destinations have seen success with community-based excursions and cultural programming that are designed and led locally. These approaches not only enhance the visitor experience, but also help preserve heritage, build community pride, and create employment opportunities.

### CREATING PLATFORMS FOR DIALOGUE

Creating dedicated platforms for dialogue, whether in the form of advisory groups, liaison committees, or destination management forums, can provide a space for continuous engagement between cruise operators, local authorities, and community representatives. In doing so, cruise tourism becomes a shared endeavour built on trust, where benefits are maximised and challenges are addressed collaboratively; which ultimately enables long-term sustainability.

## ALIGN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS WITH SOCIAL VALUE

### INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SERVES ALL

The investment and development of cruise-related infrastructure offers an opportunity for the public and private sectors to come together to serve visitors and residents alike; delivering broader community benefits, particularly when investments are guided by inclusive and multi-use principles. Indeed, many of the improvements made to accommodate cruise ships, such as increased mobility, sanitation, signage, and public Wi-Fi within the destination, enhance the quality of life of residents, whilst fostering inclusive access and even enhancing environmental resilience.

### REINVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Governments and cruise partners should consider frameworks that explicitly link infrastructure funding to local development goals.

Revenue from cruise fees and taxes should be reinvested in projects benefiting the industry and community alike, notably initiatives which improve infrastructure, accessibility, environmental sustainability, or small business facilities.

In several destinations, such reinvestment strategies have helped reinforce public support for cruise tourism and ensured that infrastructure contributes to lasting local impact.

### INCLUSIVE DESIGN AS PRIORITY

Inclusive design should also be a priority. Accessible terminals, transport links, and public spaces, not only enhance the cruise experience but expand participation for people of all abilities; whether they be residents or visitors.

The infrastructure decisions made today shape destination capacity and resilience for decades. As such, by aligning investment with social outcomes, destinations can ensure that cruise infrastructure continues to contribute to shared progress.

## EXPAND ACCESS TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION & EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

### DIVERSE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The cruise industry presents diverse employment opportunities, both onboard and onshore, that can support lifelong careers and enable meaningful skills development.

As a powerful driver of professional growth and upward mobility, many individuals working in the cruise industry progress from entry-level roles to management positions, receiving training and building competencies that are transferable across industries and borders alike.

### CONNECTING INDUSTRY WITH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

There is a valuable opportunity to strengthen the connection between the cruise industry and national workforce development strategies to expand access to cruise-linked employment pathways, both at sea and on land. This could include establishing or scaling vocational training programmes in hospitality, food and beverage services, entertainment, and technical fields that align with cruise operations.

### REVENUE REINVESTMENT IN EDUCATION

Importantly, the benefits of cruise tourism extend beyond workforce training into education and social mobility more broadly. Revenue generated through passenger spending and cruise-related taxes can be reinvested by governments into public education systems, scholarships, and youth development programmes; particularly in small island and port economies. This helps create a more inclusive pipeline of future talent by improving access to both basic and higher education, especially for young people in cruise destinations.

For instance, in Mexico, the port of Cozumel recorded US\$483 million in cruise tourism expenditures during the 2023–2024 season, supporting 7,441 direct jobs and US\$59.5 million in direct wages, with 11,998 total jobs and US\$95.6 million in wages when accounting for indirect and induced impact<sup>79</sup>. These earnings, in turn, not only support household income but also enable families to invest in education and healthcare. Tourism authorities have partnered with cruise lines to develop vocational programmes in guiding, customer service, and safety; creating clear pathways for youth to enter the formal economy and build careers in their own communities.

### FOCUS ON UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Special attention can be given to underrepresented groups, including youth, women, rural residents, and indigenous populations. Scholarships, apprenticeships, and targeted recruitment initiatives can help remove barriers to entry, while ongoing training and career development ensure long-term progression within the industry. Onboard, cruise lines offer clear pathways for advancement through structured internal mobility and training programmes. Extending similar support structures to onshore roles, particularly in smaller or emerging destinations, can further support the creation of robust local cruise economies. Targeted support for local residents may include scholarships, job fairs, as well as recognition of national certifications that align with cruise industry standards; making it easier for individuals to access high-quality employment opportunities.

### AMPLIFYING SOCIAL IMPACT

When more people are able to benefit from meaningful jobs, and when destination revenues are channeled into education systems, the social impact is amplified; supporting household incomes, reducing inequality, and empowering the next generation of leaders.

## ENHANCE MONITORING OF SOCIAL IMPACT & PROMOTE SHARED LEARNING

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### GROWING INTEREST IN SOCIAL IMPACT

As the cruise industry continues to grow, there is increasing interest, and a clear opportunity, to better understand its social impact; how it affects communities, supports livelihoods, and contributes to broader development goals. Establishing systems to track and evaluate these outcomes can provide valuable insights for both public and private stakeholders.

### CURRENT MONITORING EFFORTS

Several destinations have already begun collaborating with research institutions, academic partners, and NGOs to monitor indicators such as local employment, community sentiment, and cultural preservation over time. These efforts support transparency, help identify areas for improvement, and encourage shared learning across ports and regions. They can also play a valuable role in informing policy and guiding investment decisions.

### GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND DATA TRANSPARENCY

Governments may wish to consider supporting destination-level monitoring initiatives that are participatory, culturally sensitive, and aligned with national development indicators. Making social impact data publicly available, alongside traditional economic measures, can help build resilience, pre-empt potential friction, and position the cruise industry as a transparent and constructive development partner. Such visibility also reinforces the broader value of cruise tourism and can strengthen trust and cooperation across sectors.

Ultimately, the success of cruise tourism should not be measured solely by arrivals or revenue, but by the degree to which it contributes to improving lives and livelihoods in the destinations it reaches.

## REFRAME CRUISING AS A PARTNER IN SOCIAL PROGRESS

### BEYOND ENVIRONMENTAL NARRATIVES

The cruise industry is often undervalued in policy discussions, despite its proven ability to contribute to sustainable development. Unfortunately, it is frequently viewed through a narrow lens, focused on its environmental footprint or its presence in a handful of overvisited destinations. While these concerns are valid, they can overshadow the broader reality: in many contexts, cruise tourism serves as a lifeline for small businesses, helps revitalise secondary ports, supports cultural preservation, and enables investment in public infrastructure.

### CRUISE TOURISM AS A LIFELINE

Raising awareness of this broader potential, both within government and across the wider development ecosystem, can help position cruise tourism as an even greater force for inclusive growth and a valuable sector for investment. Strategic public messaging, the inclusion of cruise tourism in national development plans, and cross-sector dialogues can all contribute to a more balanced and evidence-based understanding of the industry's role.

In effect, in many low-income coastal and island regions, cruise tourism plays a meaningful role in poverty reduction. It creates accessible jobs, supports household income, and enables micro-entrepreneurs to participate in the formal economy.

Its economic reach often extends into communities where few alternative livelihoods exist; in turn helping reduce vulnerability, strengthen resilience, and open pathways to upward mobility.

### ADVANCING BROADER DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Importantly, cruise tourism can also advance goals beyond tourism itself. By supporting infrastructure improvements, enabling women's economic empowerment, reducing regional disparities, and promoting cultural resilience, the cruise industry can contribute meaningfully to a range of development priorities. Indeed, through the understanding of local needs, cruise lines can strengthen relationships with destinations and local communities, creating goodwill and building a long-term social licence to operate. When framed within this broader context, cruise tourism is not only a driver of economic activity, but also a platform for long-term impact.

# TAKING THE CONVERSATION FORWARD

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## THE CRUISE INDUSTRY IS ALREADY A POWERFUL FORCE FOR GOOD

The cruise industry connects cultures, creates jobs and facilitates community development across the globe. But its positive social impact is not automatic; it is the result of deliberate choices made through policies that prioritise people, partnerships that focus on local voices, and strategic investments that serve both visitors and residents alike.

## YET THE JOURNEY DOES NOT END HERE

Unlocking the full potential of cruise tourism to become an even greater driver of inclusive and sustainable development requires a shared commitment from governments, industry leaders, and communities alike to position cruise tourism as a long-term social asset. When managed effectively, cruising becomes far more than a leisure activity; it becomes a platform for empowerment, resilience, social mobility, and opportunity.

## COMMUNITY AT THE CENTRE

Central to this is a genuine understanding of community needs. Working locally, engaging directly with residents, and fostering authentic partnerships are essential to creating goodwill and ensuring that cruise tourism aligns with local aspirations. Social impact cannot be discounted; it is not only compelling to residents but also to elected officials, for whom the wellbeing of their communities is paramount. When the benefits of cruising are visible and tangible, they strengthen trust, deepen impact, and foster lasting support.

## VISION ALREADY BEING REALISED

The insights and examples in this report demonstrate that this vision is not aspirational; it is already being realised in destinations around the world. From supporting inclusive employment and entrepreneurship to enhancing infrastructure and preserving cultural heritage, cruise tourism is delivering meaningful value when integrated into broader national development strategies.

## NOW IS THE TIME TO TAKE THE CONVERSATION FORWARD

By translating recommendations into action and fostering ongoing dialogue among all stakeholders, we can maximise the social potential of cruise tourism. With continued collaboration and smart, inclusive policy, cruise tourism will not only be a vital economic engine but facilitate a shared prosperity; anchored not only offshore, but in the everyday lives of the communities it touches.

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