

**Seatrade
Cruise
Med**

16-17 September 2026
Las Palmas Cruise Port. Las
Palmas de Gran Canaria. Spain

Seatrade Cruise Awards Finalists

Principle Sponsors:



Destination of the Year

Dubrovnik, Croatia

Dubrovnik has been shortlisted for Destination of the Year for its data-led approach to managing cruise tourism while protecting its UNESCO World Heritage Site and supporting residents, visitors and the local economy.

Through its Respect the City programme, Dubrovnik uses real-time monitoring, predictive analytics and visitor management tools to balance tourism with the historic city's capacity. Cruise arrivals are carefully coordinated, with simultaneous arrivals limited to two ships carrying a maximum of 4,000 passengers, while new traffic measures have significantly reduced vehicle numbers around the historic centre.

The Port of Dubrovnik is also investing in greener infrastructure, renewable energy, air-quality monitoring and digitalisation, with cruise revenues reinvested into heritage conservation, public spaces and sustainable mobility.

The results demonstrate measurable progress: the vulnerability index of Dubrovnik's historic core has fallen from 7.8 to 4.3, while the destination achieved 86.04% compliance with UN sustainability criteria. In 2026, the European Commission recognised Dubrovnik as the European Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism.

Gibraltar

Gibraltar has been shortlisted for Destination of the Year for its continued investment in heritage, culture and visitor experiences, alongside an approach designed to ensure cruise tourism benefits the wider community.

Cruise activity has grown significantly, with calls increasing from 185 in 2024 to 220 in 2025 and approximately 260 forecast for 2026. Gibraltar has complemented this growth by investing in attractions including the World War II Tunnels, City Under Siege exhibition, Moorish Castle, Trinity Lighthouse and Northern Defences. Expanding its visitor offering encourages guests to explore more of the destination, helping redistribute footfall beyond traditionally busy sites.

The experience begins at the cruise terminal, where local art, historical re-enactments, live entertainment and interactive installations create a distinctive sense of place while encouraging visitors into the town centre and supporting local businesses.

Gibraltar also works with cruise lines to stage cultural experiences in St Michael's Cave, providing opportunities for local performers and supporting charitable initiatives while showcasing the destination's heritage, culture and hospitality to international visitors.

Stavanger, Norway

Region Stavanger has been shortlisted for Destination of the Year for its collaborative and responsible approach to cruise tourism, balancing the needs of visitors, cruise lines, local businesses, crew and residents.

Stavanger has helped lead the development of Norway's first national guidelines for cruise lines and guests, while initiatives including free tours for Old Stavanger residents have created opportunities for open dialogue around visitor management and strengthened relationships with the local community.

Its Crew Project has brought together 48 local partners and

welcomed 285 crew members to 18 complimentary experiences since 2025, improving crew welfare while supporting local businesses. The initiative has since inspired similar programmes elsewhere in Norway.

Stavanger's 48-member Cruise Network further supports training, product development, knowledge sharing and measurement of cruise tourism's local economic contribution. Alongside improvements to shuttle logistics, regular onboard visits and engagement with local stakeholders, these initiatives demonstrate Stavanger's commitment to creating a well-managed, locally beneficial and sustainable cruise destination.

Expedition Cruise Initiative of the Year

Aqua Expeditions – Superyacht Aqua Lares

Aqua Expeditions has been shortlisted for Expedition Cruise Initiative of the Year for Aqua Lares, its new Polar Class 6 expedition superyacht, which debuted in the Seychelles in February 2026 before beginning Arctic expeditions in May.

Accommodating just 30 guests across 15 suites, Aqua Lares combines highly personalised service with the ability to access remote destinations beyond the reach of larger ships. It is the first and only superyacht in both the Seychelles and Arctic bookable by individual cabin as well as private charter.

Its itineraries span two hemispheres, from the Seychelles,

Aldabra Atoll, Zanzibar and Tanzania to Svalbard, the Norwegian Arctic and Scottish Isles. Twice-daily expert-led excursions immerse guests in each destination through wildlife encounters, Zodiac exploration, kayaking, diving and guided walks.

On board, extensive wellness and social spaces complement destination-inspired dining from Michelin-starred chef Karime López. With a 1:1 crew-to-guest ratio, Aqua Lares brings together small-scale luxury, culinary excellence and immersive exploration to offer a distinctive approach to modern expedition cruising.

HX Expeditions + AROS – 1896 Cabin, A 130 Years Experience

HX Expeditions has been shortlisted for Expedition Cruise Initiative of the Year for its 1896 Cabin, created with AROS Marine to celebrate 130 years of exploration and bring the origins of expedition cruising to life.

Launched aboard MS Fridtjof Nansen in May 2026, the limited-edition experience transforms a modern cabin into an immersive recreation of a late 19th-century expedition vessel. Guests can spend one night surrounded by handcrafted wooden interiors, vintage-style furniture, bespoke linens, atmospheric lighting and other sensory details, combining historical storytelling with modern comfort and safety.

Developed through research and collaboration between HX and AROS Marine, the cabin uses natural and reclaimed materials, including recycled oak and timber from old European buildings. Its limited one-night format creates an intimate connection between today's travellers and HX's pioneering 1896 expedition voyage.

The initiative also supports HX's wider purpose, with half of booking profits donated to the HX Foundation to fund conservation and community projects worldwide, combining heritage, innovation and responsible expedition travel.

UNITED WATERWAYS X Ocean Advice – Newbuild Programme in China

UNITED WATERWAYS, through its subsidiary Ocean Advice, has been shortlisted for Expedition Cruise Initiative of the Year for a newbuild programme designed to make expedition cruising more accessible, flexible and sustainable for a wider range of operators.

Developed under an eight-vessel framework agreement with China Merchants Cruise Shipbuilding, the programme includes four expedition vessels, with the first scheduled for delivery in 2028. Designed for up to 186 passengers, the smaller-scale ships will enable access to remote coastal regions, sensitive environments and ports beyond the reach of larger vessels.

Central to the initiative is a flexible white-label model, allowing tour operators, travel companies and other brands to create an expedition product tailored to their own identity and guests, supported by established maritime and hospitality expertise.

The programme combines hybrid propulsion, international design expertise and Chinese electrification capabilities, with potential expedition features including Polar Class capability, Zodiac embarkation areas and observation lounges. With early market interest already secured, the initiative offers a scalable new model for future expedition cruising.

Innovative Shorex of the Year

Abercrombie & Kent (Akorn Destination Management) – The Zero Waste Circular City Melbourne

Abercrombie & Kent has been shortlisted for Innovative Shorex of the Year for Zero Waste Circular City, a Melbourne shore excursion designed around the principles of rescue, reuse and regeneration.

Rather than simply observing sustainability initiatives, guests actively participate in Melbourne's circular economy through three community partnerships. At FareShare Kitchen, they work alongside chefs preparing nutritious meals using rescued food, contributing to efforts to address food insecurity. At ReWine, guests explore a zero-waste retail model based on refill and reuse systems, while CERES Community Environment Park introduces them to urban agriculture, renewable energy and

community-led environmental education.

The full-day experience aims to transform sustainable sightseeing into meaningful participation, giving cruise visitors an opportunity to contribute to the community while learning from local organisations pioneering alternative approaches to food, retail and urban living.

By bringing together food rescue, circular retail and urban agriculture within one cohesive experience, Zero Waste Circular City demonstrates how shore excursions can combine memorable destination engagement with tangible social and environmental benefits, offering a purpose-led model for cruise tourism.

Excursions Ltd – The Whitstable Oyster Farm, from Beach to Table

Excursions Ltd has been shortlisted for Innovative Shorex of the Year for its Whitstable Oyster Farm, From Beach to Table experience, created in partnership with a working oyster farm to offer guests an immersive insight into one of Britain's oldest seafood traditions.

Timed around the tides, guests put on waders and walk across the shoreline at low tide to reach oyster beds that are inaccessible for much of the day. There, they meet local oyster farmers and discover first-hand how oysters are cultivated, harvested, graded and distributed, before enjoying freshly

shucked Whitstable oysters paired with English sparkling wine.

Sustainability and local impact are central to the experience. The excursion supports a long-established coastal business while introducing guests to the role responsibly managed oyster farming can play in filtering seawater and supporting marine biodiversity.

Since launching in 2026, the excursion has achieved perfect guest feedback scores across its first two sailings, combining exclusive access, hands-on participation, local heritage and sustainable food production in an authentic coastal experience.

Intercruises Shoreside & Port Services X National Geographic Expeditions – Behind the Scenes of the Carreiros do Monte

National Geographic Expeditions and Intercruises have been shortlisted for Innovative Shorex of the Year for an exclusive Madeira experience offering rare access to the people and craftsmanship behind Funchal's historic Monte toboggans.

Created around authenticity, storytelling and local connection, the tour gives National Geographic guests exclusive access to the Carreiros workshop, which is normally closed to the public. Here, guests can discover how the traditional wicker sleds are made and maintained, learn about the materials, clothing and distinctive footwear used by the Carreiros, and hear the stories

behind a tradition dating back to around 1850.

The experience also includes skip-the-line access to the famous two-kilometre toboggan ride and a visit to one of Madeira's oldest bakeries to discover and taste traditional bolo do mel honey cake.

Certified against Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria, the tour combines cultural preservation with responsible tourism. A portion of proceeds also supports the National Geographic Society's research and sustainability programmes worldwide.

Port of the Year

Port Cabo Rojo, Dominican Republic

Port Cabo Rojo has been shortlisted for Port of the Year for its rapid growth as a Caribbean cruise destination and its contribution to tourism, employment and sustainable development in the southern Dominican Republic.

Since opening, the port has grown from five cruise calls and 12,297 passengers in 2024 to 42 calls and 179,980 passengers in 2025, with more than 221,000 passengers projected for 2026. Today, the port directly employs 210 people and supports an estimated 1,800–2,000 indirect jobs across local tourism, transport and services.

Designed as a destination in its own right, Port Cabo Rojo offers themed areas incorporating pools, dining, entertainment, retail and beachfront experiences, while encouraging guests to explore regional attractions including Bahía de las Águilas and downtown Pedernales.

Sustainability is embedded within its development through initiatives addressing single-use plastics and responsible waste management, alongside reef monitoring with Reef Check Dominican Republic and lower-waste excursions at Laguna de Oviedo. Together, these efforts aim to balance cruise growth with community benefit and environmental protection.

Portsmouth International Port, UK

Portsmouth International Port has been shortlisted for Port of the Year for combining investment, operational excellence and strong cruise-line partnerships with measurable benefits for passengers, the community and the environment.

In August 2025, Portsmouth hosted the worldwide launch of Virgin Voyages' Brilliant Lady, becoming the first port to welcome all four of the line's Lady Ships. Cruise growth continued in 2026, with Ambassador Cruise Line basing Ambition in Portsmouth alongside returning partners including Saga, Fred. Olsen, Virgin Voyages and Viking.

A major milestone was the introduction of SEA CHANGE, a shore-power system serving the port's three busiest berths.

Compatible ships can now switch off auxiliary engines while alongside, with the system forecast to avoid around 20,000 tonnes of CO₂e annually.

Alongside personalised passenger services and community-led cultural experiences, Portsmouth maintains an average passenger satisfaction score of 9.8. Its wider economic impact is also significant, with more than 131,000 cruise passengers generating £10.8 million in local visitor expenditure, demonstrating how the port's continued growth supports both the cruise industry and its home city.

Skjolden Port, Norway

Skjolden Port has been shortlisted for Port of the Year for transforming its cruise operations into a locally driven model designed to keep more of the benefits of tourism within the surrounding community.

Following investment of more than \$10 million, the port established its own locally based coach company, introduced a new shore excursion programme and trained more than 25 local guides and students. Its local-vendor approach enables businesses, attractions and suppliers to work directly with the port, while the Skjolden Port Marketplace gives local producers an opportunity to sell directly to cruise guests.

Significant infrastructure improvements have accompanied this growth. The 127.5-metre quay has been widened to improve passenger flows and accessibility, alongside new coach staging, security infrastructure, a service building and expanded facilities. Shore power is also in planning.

New locally delivered experiences have broadened the destination's offering, including mountain and fjord itineraries and a Viking experience. With cruise calls increasing from around 20 three years ago to 42 in 2026, Skjolden is building a cruise model centred on local capacity, community participation and long-term growth.

Product of the Year

MarineXchange Software – MXP365, 2025/2026 Developments

MarineXchange Software has been shortlisted for Product of the Year for MXP365, a unified digital guest platform designed to connect the cruise experience from pre-cruise planning through onboard services and post-cruise engagement.

Available across mobile, web portals, self-service kiosks, in-cabin TV and digital signage, MXP365 allows guests to check in, access boarding passes, explore itineraries and deck plans, and book dining, excursions, activities and wellness treatments through one connected system.

AI-driven features provide personalised recommendations based on guest interests and preferences, while a multilingual

AI chatbot with voice support offers 24/7 access to information and services. Integration with housekeeping, maintenance and special requests also helps automate routine tasks for onboard teams.

MXP365 addresses the challenge of fragmented digital systems by bringing guest services, communications and operational functions into one platform, with offline support at sea. Supported by MarineXchange's wider footprint of more than 400 installations across over 60 cruise brands, MXP365 is being deployed by operators across different areas of the global cruise sector.

Otalio – Shipboard Passenger Management System

Otalio GmbH has been shortlisted for Product of the Year for Otalio SPMS, a modern Shipboard Passenger Management System designed specifically to manage the operational complexities of today's cruise industry.

The web-based and offline-capable platform brings together critical shipboard and shoreside processes, including guest services, embarkation, crew management, point of sale, excursions, housekeeping, dining, financials, immigration and reporting. Its technology enables operations to continue reliably even when connectivity between ship and shore is limited or temporarily unavailable.

Designed as an alternative to traditional legacy systems, Otalio SPMS combines modern interfaces with open APIs, secure access controls and resilient ship-to-shore data synchronisation. It aims to reduce operational complexity, standardise processes across fleets and make it easier to introduce new functionality, while its browser-based interface can simplify training for onboard teams.

The platform is currently installed on 38 ships, supporting approximately 130,000 passengers each day, with more than 20 additional installations contracted or planned across contemporary, luxury and expedition cruise operators.

Zeero Group – Circular Biofuel Technology for Cruise

Zeero Group has been shortlisted for Product of the Year for its circular biofuel technology, designed to address two major challenges facing the cruise sector: decarbonisation and waste management.

Using Hydrothermal Liquefaction technology licensed from the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory and U.S. Department of Energy, Zeero converts wet waste including wastewater, food waste and agricultural residues into biocrude oil in around 15 minutes. This can then be upgraded into drop-in fuels compatible with existing marine engines and bunkering infrastructure, without requiring vessel redesigns.

Zeero states that its biofuels produce at least 81% lower emissions than fossil fuels, while the process can reduce landfill requirements by up to 90% and eliminate contaminants including PFAS and microplastics. Its modular processing units can be installed at wastewater treatment facilities, creating a scalable model for different destinations.

Over the past year, Zeero has secured technology licensing and Letters of Intent with an international oil company and a cruise line, supporting plans for pilot deployment and future commercial adoption within the sector.

Principle Sponsor:



Sustainability Initiative of the Year

MSC Cruises x ORCA Partnership – Marine Mammal Observer Sailing Onboard

MSC Cruises has been shortlisted for Sustainability Initiative of the Year for its partnership with marine conservation organisation ORCA, launched alongside the cruise line's inaugural Alaska season to support responsible operations in one of the world's most whale-rich environments.

During peak whale season in 2026, an ORCA-trained Marine Mammal Observer joined MSC Poesia, working alongside bridge officers to identify whales in real time, study vessel interactions and evaluate whale-avoidance procedures. Using specialist observation equipment, the programme connects scientific research directly with operational decision-making and explores technologies that could improve marine mammal detection.

The partnership also engages guests through educational lectures, onboard whale-watching and ORCA's OceanWatchers citizen science platform. Crew education is another key element, with nearly 700 MSC Cruises crew members already completing ORCA's whale-avoidance training worldwide.

Following the project, ORCA will publish a scientific report to share its findings with the wider maritime and scientific communities, helping inform future training, conservation initiatives and responsible operating practices across wildlife-rich destinations.

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings – Sailing for Nature: Biodiversity Programme Alaska

Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings has been shortlisted for Sustainability Initiative of the Year for Sailing for Nature, a biodiversity programme developed with NatureMetrics that transforms Alaska cruise voyages into platforms for marine research and education.

Using environmental DNA technology, seawater samples collected during voyages can identify marine mammals, fish and other species without direct observation or disturbance. Following an initial pilot, the programme expanded across 18 Alaska sailings in 2025 and 2026, embedding biodiversity monitoring into routine cruise operations.

Results have included a reported 135% increase in marine

species and a 17% increase in diversity recordings since data collection began, alongside the detection of climate-related ecosystem signals and the establishment of a biosecurity baseline.

Guests are also connected to the research through educational programming, youth activities and ecosystem interpretation, with more than 13,000 young participants expected during the 2026 Alaska season. By combining scientific research, shipboard operations and guest engagement, the programme creates a scalable model for collecting long-term biodiversity data while encouraging greater understanding and stewardship of marine environments.

Port of Dover – Carbon Net Zero

The Port of Dover has been shortlisted for Sustainability Initiative of the Year after achieving Carbon Net Zero for Scope 1 and 2 emissions in 2025, becoming the first UK port to reach this milestone.

Despite operating the UK's busiest port, handling more than 130 ferry movements each day alongside growing cruise and cargo operations, Dover has reduced its CO₂e emissions by 98.37% since 2007. Key measures include switching to renewable electricity, installing solar arrays capable of generating up to 1.5MW of power and replacing diesel with sustainably sourced Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil across vessels, vehicles and port equipment.

Further progress has included replacing gas heating at Cruise Terminal 2, switching remaining gas supplies to renewable sources and beginning a road-vehicle electrification programme. Residual 2025 emissions were offset through an approved local regenerative farming scheme, with emissions externally verified against recognised international standards.

The milestone forms part of Dover's wider decarbonisation strategy, with the port now working towards achieving Net Zero across Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions by 2030.

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Sustainability Initiative of the Year

Virgin Voyages – Impact Squad, Crew Volunteer Programme

Virgin Voyages has been shortlisted for Sustainability Initiative of the Year for Impact Squad, its Crew volunteer programme designed to create positive environmental and community impact in the destinations its ships visit.

Working alongside local nonprofit organisations, Crew members participate in projects shaped around each community's priorities. Over the past 12 months, 71 volunteer events delivered 4,141 hours of service with 28 nonprofit partners. Activities have ranged from beach restoration, mangrove planting and coral conservation to protecting sea turtle nesting sites, maintaining trails and supporting neighbourhood improvement projects.

The programme also inspired a dedicated 12-night Impact Voyage, incorporating a volunteer opportunity in every port. During the voyage, 168 Crew members contributed 639 hours of service – a 136% increase compared with an average month – with 61% participating in Impact Squad for the first time.

Alongside its community and environmental benefits, Impact Squad brings together Crew across different roles, departments and nationalities, strengthening onboard connections while building long-term relationships with local organisations and encouraging meaningful engagement with the destinations Virgin Voyages visits.