

MEDIA RELEASE
Italy-IORA Dialogue Partnership
IORA webinar on Developing Sustainable Cruise Tourism
Rome, 21 October 2020

The Indian Ocean Region and the Members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) are well positioned for making a significant contribution as a potential “niche” market for international cruise tourism. This was the major outcome of a webinar hosted by Italy and IORA on developing sustainable cruise tourism on 21 October 2020 as part of the XI edition of “Diplomacy - Festival della Diplomazia” being held in Rome.

The webinar brought together representatives from IORA Member States, Dialogue Partners, and private cruise industry from Italy and across the Indian Ocean region. The event was also attended and addressed by the Vanilla Islands Organisation and the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).

The event was opened by Undersecretary Hon. Manlio Di Stefano of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, who underlined that the webinar was a concrete follow-up to the IORA First (virtual) Core Group Meeting on Tourism, which took place on 31 August 2020.

Undersecretary Di Stefano noted that Italy has been the first country in which cruises restarted operating, adopting new rules and mechanisms, and that Italian key players in the cruise sector who have developed specific health and safety protocols with the support of national Authorities, were participating in the webinar to share experiences and specific programmes:

- As part of concrete cooperation with IORA and its Member States in this sector, Italy plans to offer a training course for cruise terminal officers from IORA countries, in collaboration with the Civitavecchia Port Authority and its state-of-the-art cruise terminal.
- Italy considers this cooperation with IORA on Cruise tourism as ongoing, and to this end proposed to host a specific high-level meeting with IORA Member States on this issue in the Italian Pavilion during Expo Dubai, taking advantage of the event “Across the Waters: Moving Money, Good, and People over the Indian Ocean” which will take place during the 20-26 March 2022 “Water Week”.

The event was also addressed by the current Chair of IORA, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by H.E. Mohammad Al Mheiri, Undersecretary – Minister Advisor for Tourism, Ministry of the Economy. Undersecretary Al Mheiri noted the unprecedented effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly on cruise tourism. He stressed the need to strengthen health and safety protocols, and to improve confidence in restarting the cruise tourism industry in the region and beyond.

Dr Nomvuyo Nokwe, the IORA Secretary General, recognised Italy for its dynamic approach towards developing creative programmes and projects in support of IORA's vision and goals. There is an extremely dynamic partnership evolving between IORA and Italy, and the webinar serves as an exciting starting point to developing Italy-IORA cooperation in the field of Sustainable Cruise Tourism, particularly through capacity building and training programmes for IORA and its Member States.

The keynote address was delivered by the Deputy Minister of Tourism of Maldives, Dr Naushad Mohamed. The Deputy Minister stressed that global and cruise tourism has taken a heavy toll from the COVID-19, with the full economic impact of lock down on cruise tourism yet to be realized. IORA members have, however, a unique advantage in terms of geographic locations and rich cultural heritage that are often sought after by cruise travelers. “We need to study the rich cultural heritage and tourist experiences that member destinations have to offer for tourists” the Deputy Minister stated. To this end, the Maldives myriad tourism experiences were highlighted, including that the Maldives was the first sea-border country in South East Asia to open for international tourists, and is listed in the WTCC safe tourism list. He further called upon member countries to establish both formal and informal networks to improve connectivity and unity to build tourism among IORA members with their unique cultural heritage and marine resources to outperform competing regional collaborations.

The webinar agenda included important issues for discussion affecting the global tourism and cruise industry:

- the impact of COVID-19 on the global cruise industry, especially job creation.
- how cruise lines and cruise ports are fighting back (prevention & control, emergency mechanisms) e.g. involvement of industries and ports.
- restarting cruise markets and regaining market confidence.
- future development trends of the cruise industry after the pandemic (innovation and sustainability as the new normal).



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IORA Member States, who have long shown a keen interest in developing cruise tourism in the region further, benefited from sharing experiences with Italy and other countries, especially at this challenging time of COVID-19 and beyond. It also established an open dialogue between important Cruise operators and in promoting cross-country initiatives and exclusive partnerships to foster mutual enrichment. This included discussions on strategies and policies at a very concrete level involving Italian operators to assist in working with IORA Member States in the further development of the cruise tourism industry in the IORA Region.

IORA is an international intergovernmental regional organisation of 22 Member States located on the Indian Ocean Rim. The Association has 10 Dialogue Partner Countries from across the globe, and Italy was the latest to join in 2019.

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