

## **Cruise ships in times of crisis – an insight into the future.**

Among all the various markets of the tourism business, the cruise ship sector has been one of the most heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions. On one hand, large cruise ships are still unavailable; yet on the other hand, the new season of river cruises has already opened and small cruise ships operators have an optimistic vision of the future.

Going forward into the future, a niche benefit for those vessels appears to be the ability to create custom made individual trips using small cruise ships to visit the historic city ports in the Baltic Sea region. For this reason, the ports in Sassnitz/Mukran, Rostock (city port), Kalmar, Karlskrona, Gdynia and Szczecin are exploring the benefits and opportunities offered by the Interreg South Baltic programme funding. This programme's aim is to prepare offers for small cruise ships, which call at smaller ports, mainly near the city centre, far from popular cruise ships routes. The mere perspective of an economically viable cruise ship sector allows multi-million euro structural fund grants for the modernisation of city harbours in for example Rostock and Wismar.

“Visits of small cruise ships have already been put on the agenda in Gdańsk” - says Tom Berthold from Sartori & Berger (Gdańsk/Szczecin). “Szczecin is now getting ready for such visits, soon small cruise ships will be able to moor near the Pomeranian Dukes Castle, for instance” completes Marta Borowska, tourism manager from Zeluga Ltd. , branch office Szczecin.

How are the members of the JOHANNA project dealing with the cruise ship business crisis related to coronavirus? Tourism that makes use of small cruise ships, large yachts and tall ships is significantly different from the concept of mass tourism on large cruise ships. In order to make a difference on an international scale, professional training for tour guides and cruise management courses will be designed within the JOHANNA project. They will include a range of topics related to areas being funded by the European Union, e.g. creating a network of contacts, development of cities and ports, marketing, tourism and other activities related to cruise ships. The graduates will qualify as cruise managers and will be able to develop cruise tourism within the area of South Baltic. The JOHANNA project will contribute to increasing the quality of training courses for tour guides. These courses will blend practical experience gained in different places with professional academic knowledge. “Local history and international storytelling trends are ideal training courses for our tour guides” - said Sibylle Donath from Hanseatic City Wismar.

Both modules will strengthen the tourist sector, will result in increasing employment possibilities and will contribute to a balanced development through a greater number of better qualified tour guides.

On a global scale, as well as in the Baltic Sea region, the trend of “smaller ships in less crowded areas” has already gained a foothold. When about eight years ago we began to create a network of contacts, we started to co-operate with the Grand Circle Cruise in Boston. In the meantime “Clio” has visited several times and according to our concept, bookings for 2021 are currently being made for ports in the Baltic Sea region.



*The MS "Clio" in the port of Visby, Gotland (S). With the small modern cruise ship, the Grand Circle Corporation offers exclusive summer excursions in the Baltic Sea Region. That is why it gets its exclusive berth in Visby, some foot steps away from the historic city centre. It is easy to see: small cruise ships do not dominate the proportions of heritage city centres and their citizen's community. Conflicts - such as e.g. in Venice or Rhodos- there will be no. The large cruise ships for mass tourists are handled elsewhere, further away from the city centre.*



*The MS "Serenissima" in industrial port area of Gdańsk. Colleagues of the JOHANNA project team from Karlskrona, Kalmar, Szczecin and Sassnitz, visiting the small cruise ship "Serenissima". The ship would fit in the historic city port of Gdansk. Creating the conditions for this is one of the future tasks.*

The small sea cruise ships market turns out to be a good way of overcoming the crisis in the short-term and mid-term perspective. Small ships, fewer passengers, more space, more individualised planning, and focus on a certain area: all these factors mean that Baltic cities with their small historic ports in the centre are getting ready for the future at an appropriate time. "If river cruise ships have only been constructed in Rostock for nearly ten years, and their operation has been successfully managed by A-Rosa company in Rostock, we therefore dream of another European small cruise ships operators managed by local companies", says Rostock's project manager, Andreas Schubert.

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