



PortCREW

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Newsletter 2/2025



PortCREW - Port-City Regions To Wave Med Cruise Destinations As Smart, Sustainable And Striking Eco-Tourism Systems



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What you'll find in this newsletter

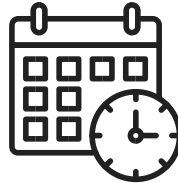
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1. The PortCREW project in a nutshell

**Total budget****€ 2 028 851****Project duration****33 months****Interreg Funds****€ 1 623 081**

PortCREW (Port-City Regions To Wave Med Cruise Destinations As Smart, Sustainable And Striking Eco-Tourism Systems) is an EU Project co-funded by Interreg Euro-MED that responds to cruise tourists' growing demand for authentic, accessible, and sustainable inland experiences, by testing an innovative eco-tourism platform across five Mediterranean ports in Spain, France, Italy, Slovenia, and Greece.

The cruise sector continues to be one of the fastest-growing sectors of tourism. The Mediterranean basin in particular, has long been a magnet for tourists worldwide and in 2024 it was the second cruise destination at the world level. However, the rise of mass tourism has brought both opportunities and challenges to the ports and destinations of the MED regions.



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Starting from these considerations, the PortCREW project's strategic objectives are:

- Tackle overtourism/seasonal tourist peak problems in MED cruise small and middle-size cities.
- Valorise inland natural and cultural assets as cruise ports' decongestion strategy.
- Increase social acceptability of the cruise sector in MED cities thanks to more balanced touristic flow management at territorial levels.
- Favour a better inclusion of cruise tourism sustainable management measures in local/regional urban, touristic and transport planning/strategic tools.
- Create a new transnational tool for the provision of dynamic and interoperable touristic information in the MED cruise terminals





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1.1 What we do

PortCREW aims to promote smart and sustainable ecotourism in Mediterranean cruise ports by increasing the visibility and attractiveness of lesser-known inland natural areas and local events.

This is supported by a jointly developed smart platform that collects and ranks eco-tourism destinations, helping identify experiences with high sustainable value. The platform is designed to assist cruise operators and public authorities in delivering more targeted information at cruise terminals, while also supporting the creation of more sustainable, locally rooted tourism packages for cruise passengers.



As an innovative digital solution, the PortCREW platform gathers, organizes, and shares up-to-date information with cruisers, highlighting eco-tourism activities, hidden destinations, and their unique historical, cultural, and natural value.



1.2 The five pilot actions

Valencia

Testing the PortCREW platform to diversify tourist offerings, reduce congestion, and tailor packages for families and people with disabilities. A new electronic totem at the cruise terminal will provide tourist information.

Koper

Promoting destinations beyond the city center and sustainable access. Smart benches at the terminal will share eco-tourism info and offer electric bike charging.

Toulon

Advancing sustainable cruise tourism through eco-tour labeling, low-impact transport, and improved onshore services. Includes info totems, charging points, and links with local networks.

Thessaloniki

Integrating PortCREW with the Smart City Pass to provide cruise travellers with tailored, sustainable experiences and seamless digital-physical engagement.

Ravenna

Using PortCREW to deliver geolocated, personalized info for independent cruisers, showcasing lesser-known eco-friendly sites and building tailored tour packages via info-totems.



2. Updates on project activities

2.1 Deliverable 1.1.1

2.1.1 What we did

We conducted a three-pillar analysis across the five Mediterranean pilot areas: Valencia (Spain), Toulon (France), Ravenna (Italy), Koper (Slovenia), and Thessaloniki (Greece).

First, we benchmarked the international eco-tourism landscape — reviewing frameworks from GSTC, ISO, UNWTO, and relevant EU-funded predecessor projects — to establish a shared reference architecture for the project.

Second, we ran over 35 stakeholder interviews across the five pilots, engaging port authorities, cruise lines, tour operators, DMOs, sustainable mobility providers, and regional institutions. Rather than surveying individual tourists, we focused on the professionals who know the cruise ecosystem from the inside.

Third, we analysed real geolocation data from non-domestic cruise passengers across all five destinations throughout 2025. This provided objective, behaviour-based evidence of where cruise visitors actually go, when they move, and what they miss entirely.

2.1.2 What we found

Cruise visitors are more mobile than the industry assumes

Between 27% (Valencia) and 49% (Thessaloniki) of non-domestic cruise passengers already venture beyond the metropolitan area during their port call. The challenge isn't generating interest in alternative destinations, but directing existing curiosity toward places that are more sustainable and less overcrowded.

Urban concentration is real, but highly uneven

In Valencia, the historic city centre captures 35% of all cruise visitor activity, while the Albufera Natural Park attracts just 6%. In Koper, 40% of passengers spontaneously visit a rural gastronomy corridor a few kilometres from the port, while an equally rich wine tourism area nearby registers only 1%. The gap is not about attractiveness. It is about visibility and access.



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Toulon is losing nearly one in three visitors to competing destinations

Around 30% of cruise passengers arriving in Toulon travel to Nice, Monaco, or Marseille instead — coach journeys of 80–120 km each way that generate significant transport emissions and deliver limited economic benefit to the local destination.

The decision window is narrow

Geolocation data shows that over 90% of cruise visitor activity in Valencia occurs between 08:00 and 15:00. Any tool designed to shift behaviour must reach passengers before they disembark. Pre-arrival digital engagement is a structural requirement, not an optional feature.

The eco-tourism offer exists. The information infrastructure does not

Across all five pilots, stakeholders consistently identified the same gap: fragmented, non-digital, inaccessible information about sustainable alternatives at the point of decision. What is missing is a practical, passenger-facing tool that works within the compressed reality of a cruise call.

What stakeholders want from the PortCREW platform is consistent across pilots: a tourist feedback and ratings system, real-time sustainable transport information from the port to eco-destinations, pre-defined thematic itineraries, and integration with cruise line booking APIs so the platform functions as a genuine distribution channel.

2.1.3 What comes next

These findings directly feed into the design of the PortCREW platform (Activity 1.2) and the definition of pilot actions in WP2. The data collected here establishes the baseline against which the project's impact will be measured when the platform goes live.

The diagnostic is done. Now we build.



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2.2 Fundació Valenciaport promotes new sustainable tourism experiences for cruise passengers in the province of Valencia



In Valencia, on the 2 March 2026 Fundació Valenciaport, with the support of the Provincial Council of Valencia, held a specialized Training Workshop on 28 February focused on cruise tourism product development. The event was aimed at destinations across the province and tourism service companies interested in working with this strategic segment.

In the case of Valencia, the PortCREW project proposes the development of new eco-sustainable routes specifically designed for emerging groups or those with particular needs, such as people with disabilities, families with young children, millennials, or Generation Z. These new proposals aim to diversify the province's tourism offer, encourage the distribution of visitors across a wider territory, and relieve pressure on the most frequented areas, thereby contributing to the social and economic sustainability of cruise tourism.



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Technical training and public-private collaboration

This regional workshop, focused on the technical training of local stakeholders, had the following main objectives:

- To design and adapt tourism products and experiences suitable for the cruise market.
- To understand the operational, logistical, and commercial requirements specific to cruise tourism.
- To promote the territorial diversification of excursions, highlighting inland and coastal resources beyond the city of Valencia.
- To foster public-private collaboration among destinations, companies, and entities forming part of the cruise value chain.



The workshop, held at the Fundación Valenciaport's facilities, brought together around 40 representatives from destinations and tourism companies across the province.

Representing the Provincial Council of Valencia were Vice President María del Remedio Mazzolari and the Provincial Deputy for Tourism, Pedro Antonio Cuesta, demonstrating institutional support for this strategic initiative for the territory.

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Collaboration from the international cruise sector

The event also featured the collaboration of MSC Cruises, which organized a technical visit on board the MSC Orchestra, allowing participants to gain first-hand insight into cruise call operations.

Speakers included Cristina Mesquida, Shore Excursions and Product Development Manager at MSC Cruises, and José Sennacheribbo, Shoreside Operations Manager at Noatum Maritime, both with extensive experience in tour operations and destination excursion management.

Technical support and future commercialization

As a follow-up to the workshop, all stakeholders interested in developing new tourism experiences tailored to the cruise market will receive guidance from the PortCrew technical team. Bilateral working sessions will be organized to support the design and adaptation of products that meet the project's requirements.

Proposals that meet the established criteria will have the opportunity to be presented during a fam trip organized within the framework of PortCrew, as a preliminary step toward international commercialization.

With this initiative, Fundación Valenciaport reaffirms its commitment to a more sustainable, diversified cruise tourism model that generates value for the entire provincial territory.



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3. Latest news

3.1 Second in person meeting in Thessaloniki

From 3–5 March, the PortCREW partners came together in Thessaloniki, Greece, for a highly productive in-person meeting focused on the project's technical development and communication activities. The discussions marked an important step forward, with all partners contributing to the progress of the platform.

Beyond the meetings, the visit offered something even more valuable: the chance to experience the project in action:

The team was warmly welcomed at the Thessaloniki Port cruise terminal for an exclusive behind-the-scenes visit. We are grateful to the port authority for hosting us and for providing such an insightful look at the port's operations. The programme then continued with an exploration of Thessaloniki's sustainable local attractions. Partners travelled by public electric bus on a guided tour of the city's monuments, walked along the seafront to the iconic White Tower, and enjoyed a local gastronomy route. It was an afternoon that brought together culture, history, nature, and gastronomy, all experienced on foot and by public transport.

This experience captured the essence of PortCREW: connecting travelers with authentic, sustainable, and local experiences in port cities. As the project continues to grow, moments like these are a strong reminder of its purpose and potential.





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3.2 The PortCREW project at the III Sun&Blue Congress on Blue Tourism and Economy



The PortCREW project was showcased at the III Sun&Blue Congress on Blue Tourism and Economy, held in Almería on 19–20 November 2025. Sun&Blue has quickly become a key European meeting point for institutions, destinations and projects working at the intersection of tourism and the blue economy, bringing together representatives from 37 countries and hosting 11 international side events in its 2025 edition.

PortCREW took part in the side event “Management and decentralisation of tourism flows in maritime and blue destinations”. In this session, we presented the project’s main objectives and highlighted how PortCREW supports the transition towards smarter and greener tourism models in the Mediterranean (MED) area. Particular emphasis was placed on how better coordination between ports, destinations and tourism businesses can help spread visitor flows beyond traditional hotspots, reduce pressure on local communities, and generate more balanced benefits across territories.

During the discussion, we explored how data, digital tools and collaborative governance can contribute to more sustainable management of passenger arrivals in port cities. The PortCREW approach – combining evidence-based analysis of cruise and ferry traffic with practical pilot actions in partner territories – was presented as an example of how



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MED destinations can move from diagnosis to implementation, aligning with EU priorities for sustainable tourism and the blue economy.

The panel provided a valuable space to exchange experiences with other Interreg Euro-MED and European projects working on similar challenges. This context allowed us to situate PortCREW within a wider community of initiatives promoting more resilient, low-impact and innovation-driven coastal tourism models.

More information about the event is available here: <https://sunandbluecongress.com/en/news/sunblue-congress-2025-strengthens-european-cooperation-in-tourism-and-the>

3.3 CERTH/HIIT showcased the Thessaloniki City Pass

On March 23, 2026, CERTH/HIIT showcased the enhanced Thessaloniki City Pass, to be implemented in the framework of the Port Crew pilot in Thessaloniki. It was highlighted that the upgraded application is designed to better meet the needs of cruise visitors while actively promoting sustainable and eco-friendly tourism experiences. The presentation was delivered during a workshop organized in the framework of the Interreg IPA Greece–North Macedonia project Green for Good (G4G).



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4. About us: the project partners

The Institute for Transport and Logistics (ITL) is a nonprofit body founded on 17th December 2003. Its purpose is to contribute to the development and promotion of logistics and transport systems in the Region Emilia-Romagna through research, consultancy and training activities.

[Visit the website](#)



The Hellenic Institute of Transport (HIT) is part of the Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH), a non-profit research organization based in Thessaloniki, Greece. HIT focuses on applied research in transportation. Its mission is to support policy-making, enhance infrastructure, and promote sustainable mobility through innovation and collaboration with national and international partners. [Visit the Website](#)



FIT Consulting is an Italian consulting firm specializing in sustainable mobility and innovation. Founded in 1997, it offers technical-scientific services in transport, logistics, and urban development. Its expertise is based on experiences in fundraising and technical and scientific assistance for the development of innovative projects and services in the transport sector, funded in different EU Programmes. [Visit the Website](#)



The Valenciaport Foundation for research, promotion and commercial studies of the Valencian Region is a hub for research, promotion, and commercial studies supporting the logistics and port sector of the Valencian Region, fostering innovation, sustainability, and global competitiveness. [Visit the Website](#)



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The Var Chamber of Commerce and Industry is a public institution of the State supporting regional economic development through a wide range of specialist services. The CCI du Var manages the commercial terminals in the ports of the Rade de Toulon. As such, it is responsible for operating the Toulon Côte d'Azur terminal. [Visit the website](#)



The Port of Koper, managed by Luka Koper d.d., is the only commercial port of Slovenia and a core node in three EU TENT Corridors. Luka Koper has a long and consolidated experience in participating and managing EU projects cofunded by several EU Programmes, both Interreg and CEF. [Visit the Website](#)



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5. Contacts

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