

The recovery of the cruise business in Uruguay

Interview with Remo Monzeglio, Assistant Secretary of Tourism of Uruguay.



As the 2022-23 cruise season is developing normally again, *Uruguay Portuario* spoke with the Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Remo Monzeglio, on various topics related to an activity that, in our country, involves numerous private and public companies, the synergies of which are facilitated by the Ministry of Tourism.

UP: After two years of forced shutdown, how is this new season developing?

Just like the rest of the world, Uruguay had its booming cruise industry paralyzed due to the pandemic. Reactivating it has involved many public and private efforts, and today I think we are reaping the rewards.

As part of the national government, and concerning tasks that fall within the Ministry's scope, we coordinate these efforts by organizing meetings with authorities from the Municipality of Montevideo (IM), the General Directorate of Migration (DGM), the National Customs Directorate (DNA), the Ministry of the Interior (MI), the Ministry of Public Health (MSP), and, of course, the National Ports Administration (ANP). For example, we have developed, together with the MI, a security plan for cruise passengers who arrive in Montevideo, and all the government agencies I mentioned are committed to ensuring the plan works effectively.

UP: You participated in the VIII Regional Cruise and Nautical Tourism Meeting in Colonia. How would you assess this event?

I believe that one of the most significant achievements of this Cruise Meeting is that we managed to gather representatives from the four countries of the region in Uruguay, as well as several authorities of their most important ports. This is of the utmost importance to the cruise business.

It offered everyone in the industry the opportunity to listen to true experts in the field. As participants, we all spent every minute of quality time available appreciating the knowledge that they shared.

This event has once again been a success. It was an opportunity to make multiple contacts and connections that let us envision a future of greater unity between countries and ports, much needed for ensuring their growth and turning this business into another great driver for the region's economies.

UP: On the event's closing day, you made efforts to solve a health-related issue raised by cruise lines during the event. How did that announcement go?

That's right, as I said at the event, companies had requested a solution to an urgent issue and they deserved a quick response from the national government. That is why I surprised them a little by making that announcement as the event was coming to an end, which was appropriate due to it being a great example of collaboration between industry players. Both MSC and Costa needed our country to no longer demand a Covid test submission from cruise passengers who wanted to go ashore, and thus be able to include Uruguay in more of their itineraries. In a few hours, our government removed the requirement and made that possible.

We must keep working to align our health security protocols with the health plans of cruise ships and other ports in the region. Among the benefits offered by Uruguay is having one of the highest Covid vaccination rates, which has been highlighted internationally.

UP: Uruguay has been known for providing outstanding services to cruises. What can be done to continue this positive evolution?

Services provided to passenger ships, both by the ANP in the port of Montevideo and by the National Hydrography Directorate in Punta del Este, are considered very good. These services, among others required by cruise ships, include provisioning, refueling, providing drinking water of excellent quality and a high number of tons per hour, disposal of grey and black water, removal of organic and inorganic waste and bilge water, crew change, and boarding and disembarking of passengers.

Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement. Thus, among other issues that need attention, Uruguay must harmonize its regulations regarding the discharge of grey and black water from ships. It must fully comply with the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), in coordination with Decree No. 259/79, which is our current regulation in force to prevent environmental pollution through water control, and review the protocols for the disposal of organic and inorganic waste from ships.

In addition, we must analyze the possibility of increasing how far in advance we allow berth reservations. Perhaps, we should increase that time to four years to keep pace with how cruise lines are conducting their business.

UP: What is your perspective on regional tourism? In what stage of development do you think it is?

That was one of the most interesting topics discussed at the VIII Cruise Meeting, both at the conferences and in private meetings and gatherings. Transport is a crucial issue in the region. We have lost air connectivity, and now, little by little and through very hard work, we are starting to recover it. This has always been a difficulty for Uruguay. In contrast, Argentina and Brazil have airlines and airports through which they can bring tourists from the northern hemisphere. From said airports, these tourists can then travel here through our Carrasco airport or on cruise ships.

We also need to work together with Chile. As a region, I think that our full potential for establishing partnerships is not being exploited, and we still have a long road ahead. We must align our health and transport policies so that we can benefit tourism for all countries. People who make long trips from one hemisphere to the other want to make the most of their time by visiting several destinations, and we all have to be prepared to support and encourage those visits.