

Bigger and better than ever

Global Ports Holding continues to expand and enhance its network of ports, and CEO Emre Sayin says there's plenty more to look forward to

As the world's largest cruise port operator, Global Ports Holding (GPH) is focused not only on expansion, but also on continuous improvement. "We learn from every new port we have the privilege of operating and we add that knowledge to our standard operating procedures so every port in our network can benefit," says Emre Sayin, CEO of GPH.

The latest steps in that journey have seen GPH expanding to operate 18 ports, 16 of which are cruise ports. Among its latest additions, Zadar in Croatia helps consolidate the company's position in the Mediterranean, while Havana and Antigua – where the company recently signed a 30-year concession agreement for exclusive port operations – are its first ports in the Caribbean. Sayin reveals that the company intends to build a fifth pier at Antigua to accommodate the largest ships in the market – and it's likely to look for further ports in the region.

"The Caribbean is the oldest and biggest region for cruising, so it attracts new and increasingly large ships," he says. "Those

ships need places to go and that demands infrastructure investment, developing the ports as well as the destinations, and expertise in managing operations with a lot of passengers. We have the business model, the knowhow and the investment to bring to the Caribbean governments that want to develop their ports and make them future-ready."

As well as optimising all its ports in terms of design, efficient operations and passenger flow, it has identified some unique areas of focus to enhance the guest experience.

One key priority is providing the right information and services for the growing number of guests who choose to explore a destination independently rather than joining a shore excursion – something that the municipal information points found in many ports can't deliver.

"We introduced Guest Information Centres (GICs) in all our ports, with staff dedicated to serving cruise guests and providing information about what the destination can provide for them," explains Sayin. "We also

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Malaga is one of the ports where GPH is creating dedicated terminals and piers for the luxury cruise market

collect feedback at GICs and provide various services that are often sought by guests, from transportation to electric wheelchairs to umbrellas. We work with cruise lines on this, to improve the experience and satisfaction of the ports and destinations.”

Retail is another area that is being transformed. “Retail in cruise ports is an underinvested, under-researched area,” says Sayin. “The retail experience in the port should complement retail in the destination and on the ship, not compete with it or replicate what’s been done elsewhere as it does in an airport.”

GPH is designing that retail experience for cruise guests, which will launch in Barcelona before being propagated throughout the network. “Cruise guests only have a few hours at a destination, and they should spend that time enjoying the destination instead of carrying packages around and worrying about where to find the best local goods and souvenirs,” says Sayin. “Our retail experience will include the best local products and souvenirs, so guests can spend their day exploring and then buy local products and souvenirs at the port before they get back on the ship.”

A consistent focus on clear standards supports GPH’s success in operating its growing number of ports. “We’ve put all our guidelines, standards and operating procedures together in a book, which we call the GPH codes and policies,” says Sayin. “Some of those best practice guidelines are put together by our own team, but we also look at the best policies

and codes out there and bring them together in the best way possible.

“Our security code, for example, encompasses two separate ISO codes as well as the International Ship and Port Facility Security code – so all three are taken care of automatically. It’s also more detailed and descriptive so the team knows exactly what to do. For instance, it includes the minimum resolution of cameras and the minimum number of passengers that need to be screened – details that aren’t usually included in the codes – to minimise guesswork.”

Environmental practices are also under the spotlight. Having identified a code for environmental practices, GPH is now working to gain EcoPorts certification for all its ports. “The first three ports – Bodrum and Kuşadası in Turkey and Malaga in Spain – will be finalised within the next couple of months, and the others will follow very soon afterwards,” says Sayin.

In advance of the new International Maritime Organization fuel regulation, GPH is also helping cruise ships to change their scrubbers during calls to its ports, instead of spending time – and money – going into dry dock. In addition, says the company is working with local authorities to enable LNG provisioning at some of its ports, to prepare for the growing number of LNG ships coming into the market over the next few years.

Operating for bigger ships is top of the GPH agenda, and Sayin says investments are set for both new and existing ports. “We’re looking at how we can expand facilities and improve infrastructure in

Malta, for example, to provide space for the next generation of ships. This involves the turning basin as well as the length of the pier and the space between piers, as ships are getting wider as well as taller. We also look at equipment to address areas like security and work with cruise lines to enable faster check-in and check-out for those ships.”

GPH is also dedicating terminals and piers at ports like Malaga, Lisbon and Bodrum for the rapidly-growing luxury cruise market. “We provide luxury cruise operators with an exclusive space and we’re looking at the services we can offer in those terminals, from local art to exclusive events,” says Sayin.

New technologies are both fuelling and enabling these trends, and Sayin is looking forward to working with cruise lines on key areas of interest. “Both consumer technology and enterprise-grade technology will provide opportunities for us,” says Sayin. “Artificial intelligence (AI) and facial recognition, combined with smartphones, offer interesting possibilities in terminals. We can look at various check-in systems using facial recognition, security supported by behavioural recognition, facial recognition and AI, and at optimising our operations and flows using cameras, AI and facial recognition to measure how people move through the terminal.”

In a time of continued growth for the cruise market, Sayin is looking forward to GPH’s continued growth. “The bigger we get the more we know,” he says. “And the more we know the more we will improve and develop.” **C&F**