

PREDIF PRESENTS THE 1ST TUR4all INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON ACCESSIBLE CRUISE DESTINATIONS

Isabel Oliver Sagreras, Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism chaired an event to unveil the congress programme and all the details of an event that boasts more than 30 speakers from 7 different countries and more than 200 delegates

Today, a dream that Predif has put its heart and soul into has become a reality. Today, 12 November, saw the official presentation of the 1st TUR4all International Congress on Accessible Cruise Destinations, which will be held in Valencia on 3 December at an outstanding venue: the Santos Las Arenas Spa & Hotel. At a ceremony presided over by Isabel Oliver Sagreras, Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism, and attended by numerous speakers, dignitaries and media sources, the details were finally released on this ambitious, innovative and pioneering international forum in the world of cruises and Universal Accessibility which will host more than 30 speakers from 7 countries, which in 7 round-table sessions will analyse, debate and share their experiences and expertise with more than 200 confirmed delegates.

“Good morning. Today, a dream has come true, today, an ambitious, pioneering and innovative project in the fields of Universal Accessibility and cruises has become a reality. Today we are proud to present the 1st TUR4all International Congress on Accessible Cruise Destinations ...” These were the opening lines of the event presided over by Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism, Mrs. Isabel Oliver, and held at the ILUNION Suites Hotel in Madrid, also attended by some of the most notable speakers to have confirmed their participation in Valencia on 3 December, such as Francisco J. Sardón, President of PREDIF; Ana García, President of Accessible Portugal; Francesca Antonelli, Director of Marketing at Valencia Port; Malik Alkarea, Director of the Cruise Division of the Ávoris Group (B The Travel Brand); Virginia López, CEO de Cruises News Media Group; Tatiana Alemán, Technical Director of Universal Accessibility, Tourism and Culture at PREDIF and Fernando Valmaseda, CEO of the RV Edipress Group and expert in tourism and strategic communication, who was appointed the task of presenting and conducting the event.

An event where all the details of the congress were revealed, a congress that promises to be pioneering in the cruise sector and of course also in the field of Universal Accessibility, and the result of 7 months' work, with more than 30 speakers from 7 different countries, who will be dealing with such important topics as 'stakeholders of the accessibility value chain in cruise tourism', 'the experiences and requests of passengers with accessibility needs', 'shipping companies and their commitment to passengers with accessibility needs', 'best practices for cruise destinations' and 'the role of travel agencies and tour operators at accessible cruise destinations'.

Regarding the Congress, the Spanish Secretary of State for Tourism, Mrs. Isabel Oliver Sagreras firstly wanted to congratulate those behind this initiative stating that *“it is a social responsibility which also requires marketing to promote it and we should be aware that wanting to carry out this type of event, then also means promoting it”*. She also indicated that *“one of the challenges is to achieve accessibility across all tourist services and that we all assume our respective responsibilities to carry it through because although we have come a long way, we also believe that there is still a great deal to do”*.

Thus, *“we have before us a pioneering, innovative and above all very practical international event”*, as pointed out by Fernando Valmaseda, CEO of the RV EDIPRESS Group, expert in Tourism and recently named Best Director of Strategic Communication in Spain, *“we have before us a forum for sharing extraordinarily important expertise which is going to build the cornerstones of a new era for the cruise sector and accessibility. A necessary turning point to reflect, to work together to create new public and private sector strategies, policies and actions that allow us to move forward in a coherent manner in the world of accessibility and inclusive tourism and tourism for all”*.

Furthermore, the presentation of the 1st TUR4all International Congress on Accessible Cruise Destinations, had none other than the President of PREDIF, Francisco J. Sardón, a chief architect of this initiative and protagonist of the presentation. During his speech, he pointed out that *“the potential of cruise*

tourism is enormous, it is a growing market and in great demand, in fact Spain is a leader in this type of tourism". He also wanted to highlight that it was at this point, with the facts in hand "when we understood the need to organise this Congress". Another of the points Sardón underlined was the economic factor, namely "the loss it may mean for a destination from a financial perspective if it does not help with accessible tourism, because **improving accessibility improves competitiveness at an international level, and although here in Spain things are being done well, there is still room for improvement**". Lastly, he wanted to send a message about his expectations of the congress saying that "we want it to be a useful forum, especially for the people on whose behalf we are working".

The speeches followed each other in close succession, some quite intense, and the reflexions expressed today by some of the speakers who will be at the Congress on 3 December are just a prelude of the important topics to be debated, confronted, analysed and exhibited to the delegates. **Ana García, President of Accessible Portugal** for example, stated that "accessible tourism is a very powerful tool and we want to work so that accessibility requirements and diversity do not become an issue when it comes to visiting tourism destinations".

Francesca Antonelli, Head of Marketing at Valencia Port stated that "we are very proud to be hosting this congress". Moreover, she stated that "ports are partly prepared for accessibility but there is still room for improvement because the whole experience should be unique". **Malik Alkarea, Director of the Cruise Division of the Ávoris Group (B The Travel Brand)** emphasised the fact that "I believe that we have an unresolved issue because just as the prices have been democratised, so should accessibility so that everyone can go on a cruise independently". Alkarea also wanted to point out that "I would prioritize the training and raising awareness among travel agents because if something fails, the whole trip is ruined. This is a value chain that must work effectively".

And last but not least, Virginia López, CEO of Cruises News Media Group, used her speech to highlight the need for congresses of this type where debate and presenting ideas to work together in pursuit of unity and of common goals in the world of Cruises and to present **the ninth edition of International Cruises Summit 2019**, which will be held on 27- 28 November in Madrid.

The ceremony was also used to present the official web page of the **1st TUR4all International Congress on Accessible Cruise Destinations**, where visitors have access to all the very latest information about the event and where they will be able to find for example the congress programme, the schedule of the different round-table sessions, the speakers (which include **Sylvia Longmire**, CEO of Spin The Globe, **Marco Pizzio**, Head of the Department of Social and Accessible Tourism at AISM and board member of ENAT, **John Sage**, founder and president of Accessible Travel Solutions and **Mirjam Versteegh**, CEO of Disabled Accessible Travel), the topics to be dealt with, the documents required to get the most out of the event, press releases, press packs, registration forms and the organisers and sponsors of the Congress (organisers PREDIF, AISM-Italian Multiple Sclerosis Association -, Accessible Portugal and ENAT - European Network for Accessible Tourism- and sponsored by the Spanish Secretariat of State for Tourism, the Spanish Ports Authority, the Valencia Region Tourism Board, Valencia City Hall, Valencia Tourism Foundation, Valenciaport, Cruises News Media Group, B The Travel Brand and the German National Tourism Office for Spain and Portugal). A web site, www.congreso.tur4all.com that is agile, very user friendly and constantly updated and an essential work guide for all those attending, or wishing to attend the Congress or simply wishing to get information about it.

