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Sustainable Tourism
Consulting & Communication

PRESS RELEASE

Berlin, February 25, 2026

HOW SUSTAINABLE IS CRUISE TOURISM – REALLY? PANEL DISCUSSION AROUND TURNING IMPACT DATA INTO BETTER CRUISE STRATEGIES AT ITB 2026

How can cruise tourism generate meaningful local income while safeguarding fragile island ecosystems? This question will take centre stage at ITB Berlin 2026 during a panel discussion hosted by the Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Foundation (SSTF) and mascontour, bringing together government leaders, researchers and industry representatives to explore practical models for a more sustainable cruise future.

The session, titled **"What Does a Sustainable Cruise Model Look Like? Designing Cruise Models that Benefit Local Economies and Respect Island Ecosystems,"** will share the first comprehensive, evidence-based findings on the direct economic and environmental impacts of cruise activities in Seychelles' Inner Islands and Marine Protected Areas.

Conducted by SSTF in partnership with the University of Seychelles and mascontour and funded by the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT), the study combines passenger surveys with stakeholder interviews to provide baseline data for policy and strategy development.

Key insights include:

1. Strong Growth – but High Seasonality

- In 2024, cruise arrivals reached **67,987 passengers**, exceeding pre-pandemic levels
- The sector is highly seasonal, with a peak between October and May
- The majority of passengers visit Seychelles as a port of call; only a small share uses Seychelles as a home port

Conclusion: Cruise tourism is growing dynamically but remains structurally volatile and seasonal.

2. Limited Local Economic Contribution

- The local economic footprint remains **modest and concentrated among few intermediaries**
- 74.8% of cruise passengers book their excursions directly with the cruise companies
- Average onshore spending:
  - Organised excursions: **USD 116 per person**
  - Individual shore visits: **USD 63 per person**
- Over **70% of passengers do not spend beyond their excursion package**, but are interested in spending more on local products if they were on offer

Conclusion: Short port stays and distribution structures limit local value retention.

3. Different Impacts by Ship Type

- Large vessels generate significantly higher total port fees (approx. SCR 790,000 vs. SCR 105,500 for an expedition ship)

Media Contact
mascontour GmbH, Matthias Beyer, Schwiebusser Str. 9, 10965 Berlin/Germany
Fon: +49 30 61625747, Mobile: +49 (0)1772047309, Mail: beyer@mascontour.info

- Total emissions are much higher for large ships; however, emissions per passenger can be higher on smaller vessels
- Expedition passengers tend to be younger, more environmentally aware, and more willing to contribute to conservation funding

Conclusion: Smaller, high-value expedition ships align better with Seychelles' sustainable tourism vision

4. Environmental and Governance Challenges

- Pressure on MPAs, waste management systems, and infrastructure
- Limited transparency in emissions data; no shore power available
- Stakeholders highlight ecological impacts and hidden costs (e.g., infrastructure depreciation, waste management)

Conclusion: Environmental management capacity and institutional coordination require strengthening.

5. Three Strategic Priorities Identified

1. **Integrating cruise tourism into destination governance**
2. **Optimizing local economic benefits**
3. **Advancing sustainability and environmental management**

Overall Assessment

Cruise tourism contributes visibility and diversification to Seychelles' visitor economy, but currently delivers **limited local economic benefits while generating notable environmental pressures**.

The study recommends a strategic shift toward **smaller, higher-value, and better-regulated cruise operations** to enhance local benefits and reduce ecological risks.

The panel will bring together representatives from government tourism authorities, academia, the cruise industry and international sustainable tourism initiatives, discussing strategic choices, policy tools and mechanisms to create more local benefits and strengthen nature conservation for island cruise destinations and coastal destinations worldwide.

Event Details:
What Does a Sustainable Cruise Model look like? Designing Cruise Models that Benefit Local Economies and Respect Island Ecosystems
3 March 2026 | 12:30
ITB Berlin – CityCube, Room 12

Characters: 3.956

Media Contact
mascontour GmbH, Matthias Beyer, Schwiebusser Str. 9, 10965 Berlin/Germany
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Find out more about the Seychelles cruise impact study "Direct Economic and Specific Environmental Impact Assessment of Cruise Activities in Seychelles' Inner Islands and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)" conducted by the Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Foundation (SSTF) in partnership with mascontour and the Blue Economy Research Institute with funding from the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust (SeyCCAT).

Full Study

Study Summary

Media Contact
mascontour GmbH, Matthias Beyer, Schwiebusser Str. 9, 10965 Berlin/Germany
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