



From Shipbuilding to Home Porting: The Cruise Industry in Italy

By Erica Silverstein

Italy's influence on the cruise industry begins with building modern cruise ships packed with innovative attractions and sustainability enhancements. It culminates in alluring Mediterranean itineraries that draw Europeans and overseas travelers alike to Italy's famous cities and boutique destinations.

Italy has an outsized impact on most aspects of the cruise lifecycle, and the cruise industry in turn is a key contributor to the country's economy.

Made in Italy: Shipbuilding and sourcing

Italy's role in the cruise industry is greater than its collection of destinations. Through cruise-related activities, Italy generated an economic output of 8.5 billion euros (more than \$21 billion) in 2024, with a 7.3-billion-euro (about \$18.5) contribution to the country's GDP, according to a [Cruise Lines International Association \(CLIA\) report](#).

Italy topped all other European countries with the financial impact of its cruise-related businesses, more than doubling the next country's output. Italy generates significant economic impact across four cruise-related areas — shipbuilding, cruise line purchases, passenger and crew spending, and staff wages.

As of April 2026, the cruise industry has committed to building 84 ships over a 14-year period, and 50 of those ships were assigned to Italian shipbuilders — for an investment of tens of billions of dollars. The largest shipbuilder, Fincantieri, is based in Trieste and has eight facilities in Italy. Fincantieri has built more than 130 cruise ships for 25 brands — including brands of Carnival Corporation, MSC Group, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings, and Royal Caribbean Group. One in every three cruisers sails on a Fincantieri-built ship, according to the company.

Fincantieri employs some 10,000 people and generates 90,000 additional jobs in Italy alone. The company is also at the forefront of the cruise industry sustainability movement, innovating with LNG (liquefied natural gas) propulsion, among other areas.

In addition to shipbuilding jobs, Italy generates revenue through provisioning the cruise industry. Cruise lines buy from local farmers, fishmongers, even cheese and pasta makers, to supply the fresh produce and quality ingredients their guests enjoy.

The allure of Italian ports

In 2025, according to CLIA, one out of six cruise passengers worldwide sailed in the Mediterranean, for a total of 5.96 million travelers. Italian ports were instrumental in drawing those cruisers to southern

Europe. With more than 15 million passengers expected to embark, disembark, or transit through Italian ports in 2026, Italy is a leading cruise destination country in Europe.

“Italian ports are not merely places to dock as they offer a unique blend of art, history, and gastronomy that is the main driver for European cruise demand,” says Laura Cimaglia, vice president of MedCruise, which promotes the cruise industry in the Mediterranean.

With more than 60 cruise ports, Italy offers access to a mix of iconic cities, such as Venice, Naples, and Rome, and attractive smaller destinations, such as Bari and Savona. The country is home to more than 60 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, many easily accessed from its coastal ports.

The abundance of Italy’s attractions drives repeat business crucial for industry success, Cimaglia says. Several Italian cities also serve as embarkation and debarkation ports for Mediterranean cruises.

Homeports are a win for cruisers and local communities alike. Visitors can custom design a longer vacation that includes a land stay. In the process they spend money on accommodations, restaurants, transportation, tours, and activities – all beneficial to the local economy. Plus, homeports as operational hubs create jobs in port services, provisioning, and logistics.

Italy as source market

Italy is not only a welcoming cruise destination, but the sixth largest passenger source market in the world, with 1.1 million Italians setting sail in 2025, according to CLIA.

What do Italians love about cruising? “The pleasure of discovering multiple destinations in one journey, the social and convivial side of travel, great food, and the balance between relaxation and cultural immersion,” says Dario Rustico, general manager Americas for Costa Cruises.

Italians most often cruise regionally in the Mediterranean (75% of bookings), but they are increasingly interested in world cruises and longer sailings to other destinations, says MedCruise’s Cimaglia.

Costa Cruises, headquartered in Genoa and with Italian-flagged ships, and MSC Cruises, founded in Italy, and now based in Geneva, help promote cruising to Italians and attract international travelers with their European atmosphere and cuisine.

“From a business perspective, they leverage the Mediterranean lifestyle as a unique selling proposition,” says Cimaglia. “These cruise lines act as ambassadors, attracting a diverse international clientele that seeks the elegance and warmth synonymous with the Italian spirit.”

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