

# GIBRALTAR

PORT AUTHORITY

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CORPORATE BROCHURE



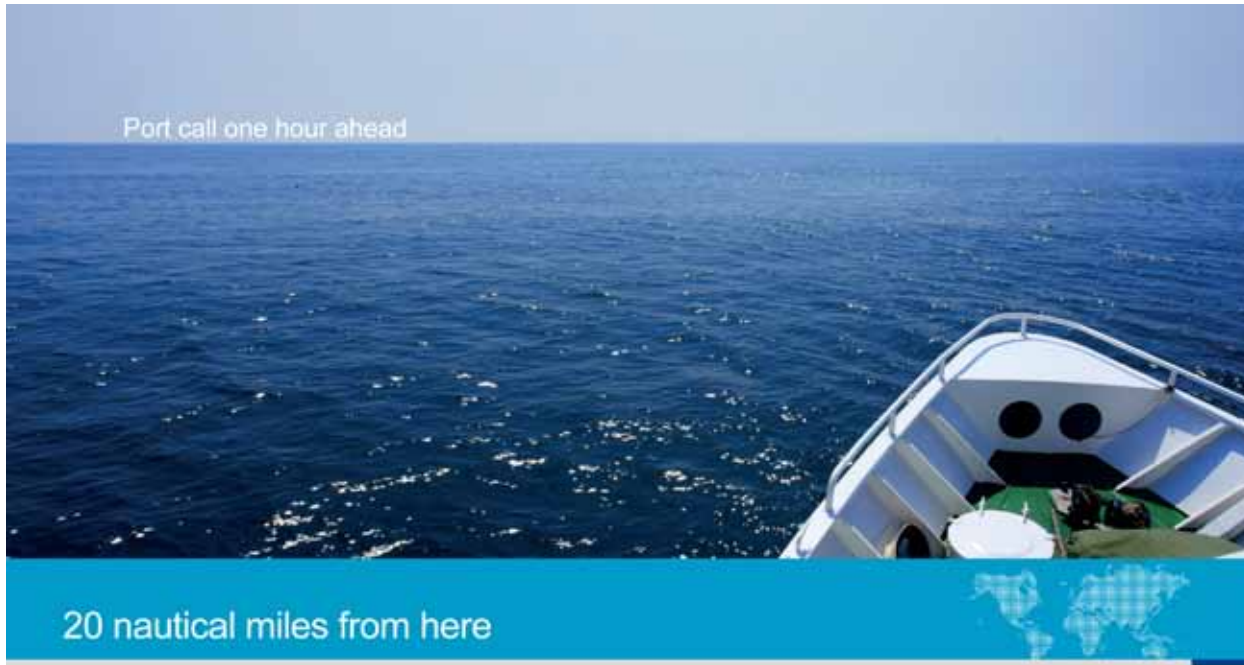


# Maritime

## motorways

It's one of the most famous nautical names in the world but offers a surprising mix of services, as Alan Swaby discovers

There can't be many ports which have an ancestry going back 2,000 years or which, at least these days, handles so little actual freight as Gibraltar. In many ways, it is unique—not just in terms of its location at the crossroads of the north-south and east-west shipping routes, but also in terms of its business mix.



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“Ports exist,” admits Captain Peter Hall, CEO of the Gibraltar Port Authority (GPA), “as the conduit for imports or exports. Gibraltar is more like a motorway service station—our role is to keep the ships of the world in motion.”

The port is managed by Hall and a core staff of less than 50 who create the conditions in which other service operators can work, providing employment for upwards of 3,000 skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Without exaggeration, Gibraltar is a bustling spot on the map. In a typical year there are some 110,000 vessels transiting the Strait of Gibraltar—

“The airport terminal here is no more than a 10 minute walk to the port, making it extremely convenient for shipping lines who want to change ships’ crews”



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in other words, around 250 per day—and 10 per cent of them call to use the facilities at Gibraltar. In typical motorway fashion, the port can feed, water and refuel whoever calls; untypically, it can also repair ships and entertain visitors.

“Gibraltar has a special tax-free status,” says Hall, “and this is particularly attractive to cruise ships on their way back north. We are often the last port of call, allowing passengers a final opportunity to take advantage of purchasing tax-free goods before returning home. It’s a nice bonus for them and 300,000 plus visitors a year represent an important multiplier to Gibraltar’s economy.”

At the less glamorous end, ship repairs take place in facilities originally built by the British Royal Navy as part of the empire’s primary defences in the days of Lord Nelson—his flagship, ‘Victory’, was one of the first warships to be repaired at Gibraltar. Now, they represent some of the largest dry dock facilities in the Mediterranean which continued to be operated by the British government until 1985, when they became a private concern.

In fact the status of the entire port changed just

five years ago when it ceased to be administered by the local government and became a private authority with an executive board made up of local professionals and business people with marine connections. “This move has been invaluable,” he says. “It allows many advantages such as making a profit, which in turn leads to development. Being responsible for your own future means that profits can be re-invested in new facilities and infrastructure. It also gives us the opportunity of making decisions faster so that we are better able to respond to customer needs.”

Considering its location, Gibraltar is not short of competitive ports. Just across the bay is Algeciras, gateway to Andalucía and the rest of southern Spain. No more than 60 kilometres away across the Strait, there is the North African port of Tangiers, offering lower operating costs than its European partners and less environmental restrictions. Fortunately, Gibraltar can leave its two neighbours to fight it out for freight supremacy because both of those are geared towards containerisation, which isn’t the case for Gibraltar.

Instead, this outlying British territory has made



an international reputation for itself as service provider to shipping lines. The most notable aspect of its service portfolio is that of a bunkering station—the largest refuelling operation in the western Mediterranean.

“In 2001,” says Hall, “the port provided 2.9 million tons of fuel oil—a figure which had grown to 4.7 million by 2009. Gibraltar’s bunkering companies can supply all grades of marine fuel, from 30 cSt to 380 cSt. We police these operations, conducting constant quality audits on each company to ensure that the service standards as set out in the Bunkering Code of Practice are met. The port has a very long-standing reputation for quality and that must be protected.”

Ships wanting fuel can be processed either tied up at berth in the harbour or, more commonly, while at anchor in the bay. This way, fuel is taken out on bunker barges—or mini tankers holding upwards of 8,000 tons of fuel. Considering that a super-tanker might need to take on 10,000 tons of fuel to get it around Africa and into Gulf waters, it often takes a couple of visits to fill a ship’s tanks.

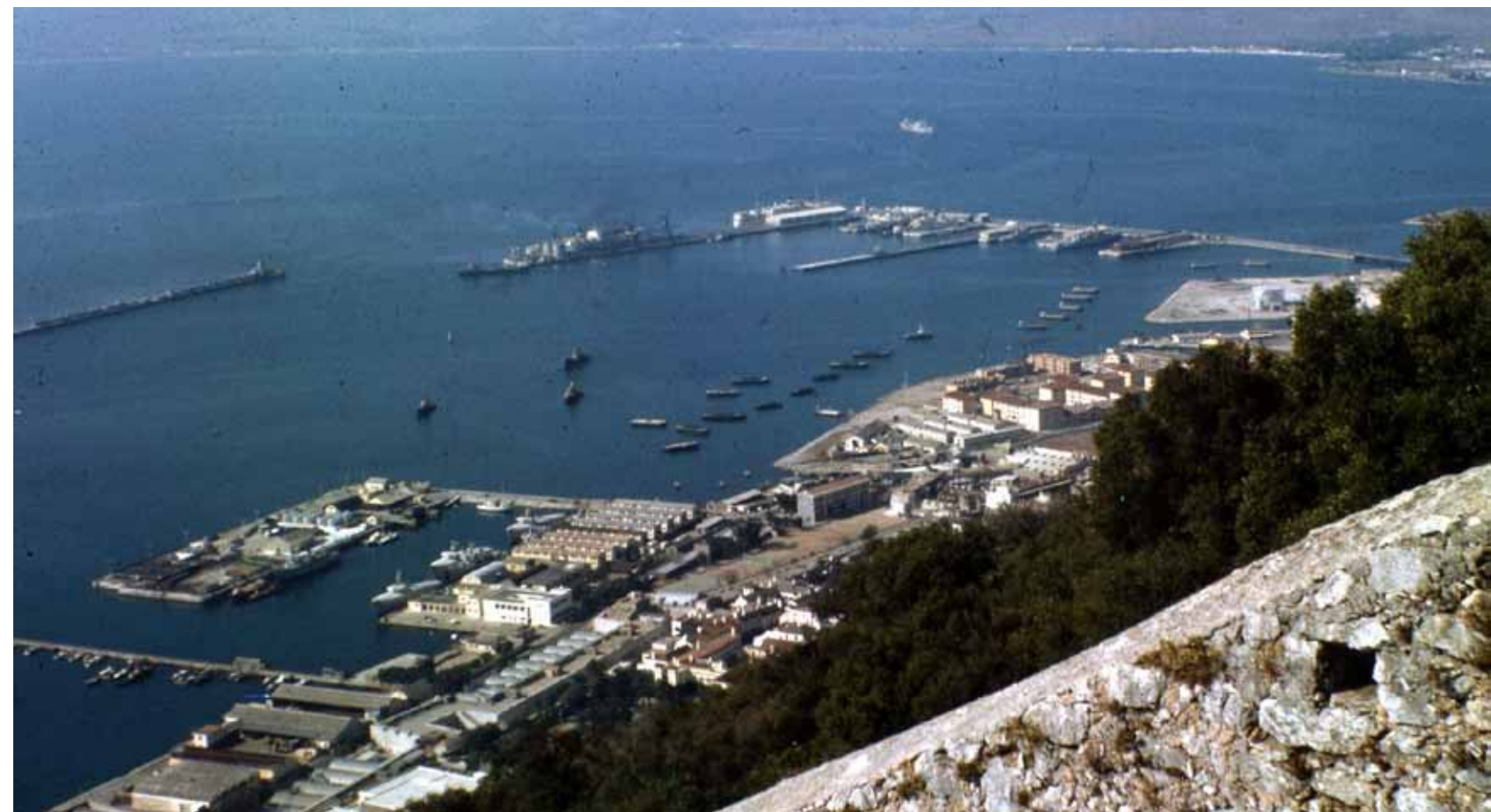
It’s also possible that a ship might need a mix of different fuels. To travel in the English Channel, for example, ships must run on low-sulphur fuel to minimise environmental impact. At times, they might need to be bunkered with as many as four different grades of fuel to meet all their needs.

Instead of being rivals, the port and local airport

are collaborators, working closely together to provide an attractive package of services. “The airport terminal here is no more than a 10 minute walk to the port,” says Hall, “making it extremely convenient for shipping lines who want to change ships’ crews. But a far more exciting prospect is using Gibraltar as the staging point for what are known as turnaround cruises. Instead of ploughing through winter Atlantic seas, northern holiday makers could fly to Gibraltar and instantly feel the sun on their backs.”

The single drawback to Gibraltar’s operations is its finite geographical limitations. Already business is missed by ships reluctant to wait for a berth, so extra capacity would be extremely welcome. An environmental impact assessment (EIA) is currently being conducted to see how waters to the east of the rock could be used as extra anchorage and more importantly increasing bunkering capacity. It’s an attractive plan as it needs little or no investment on the part of the GPA—just an assurance to the community as a whole that it doesn’t present any new problems.

If the study is favourable, it is hoped that this plan could begin in the early summer. Already there is a little slack in the bunkering provisions which could be used; but successfully attracting new customers would soon encourage local operators to expand. [www.gibraltarport.com](http://www.gibraltarport.com) ●



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