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## Health and Safety Comes First, Says Joe Boschulte to Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association

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**Three Cruise Ships Docked at the West Indian Company** By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The health and safety of residents and visitors are top priorities for the U.S. Virgin Islands, Joseph Boschulte, Department of Tourism commissioner told the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA)'s Platinum Associate Member Advisory Council (PAMAC) Virtual Conference last week.

He said that while the popular Caribbean destination entered the "Open Doors" phase of its "COVID-19 Path to a New Normal" last week, the rollout would be a careful one with continued adherence to hygiene and sanitization measures.

Mr. Boschulte said that the Department of Tourism will continue to bolster its awareness efforts as his team strengthens dialog with cruise and airline partners concerning itinerary planning and public health protocols.

"We believe that our successful reintroduction into the leisure market is going to be defined by clear education and shared expectations among guests, residents and the business community," said the commissioner, affirming that health and safety measures will not be compromised.

Mr. Boschulte, who last week also addressed the territory's Spring Revenue Estimating Conference, said that the unprecedented changes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic are dramatically affecting tourism, however, he is seeing some bright signs on the horizon.

"The continental United States will continue to be the top draw for future business (and) a steady flow of traffic is envisaged based on high interest and pent-up demand during the COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) shutdown," he said.

The return of airlift, the reopening of hotels and resorts, the resumption of the cruise industry, and the collective management of this public health crisis are factors that will affect the territory's recovery, the commissioner stated.

He believes that COVID-19 remains the decisive factor. "The reality is that until the virus is under control and efficient systems are in place to restore confidence in travel, it's simply too soon to tell when we can expect travelers to start booking again. The USVI is uniquely placed in that we are part of the United States and no passport is required for U.S. citizens," he added.

"As the U.S. Virgin Islands reopens its tourism industry to leisure visitors, we will continue to focus on protecting lives and livelihoods," Mr. Boschulte said.

"The road ahead will be challenging, but the Territory is no stranger to challenges. By working together we will make it through these difficult times, and journey through this period to a new day of normalcy," he concluded.