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Virgin Islands Welcomes Wonder of the Seas, World's Largest Cruise Ship to Territory For First Time

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An aerial shot of Wonder of the Seas docking at the Austin “Babe” Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay on Tues. March 22 2022. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Royal Caribbean's Wonder of the Seas, the largest cruise ship in the world, docked for the first time in the Virgin Islands on Tuesday at the Austin “Babe” Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay. The ship’s captain, Robert Hempstead and Virgin Islands government agencies participated in a Plaque and Keys Exchange Ceremony to commemorate the event.

"It was a very nice moment to bring this ship into the port and see it for the first time from the bridge of the Wonder of the Seas," said Mr. Hempstead during the ceremony.

Though Wonder of the Seas could accommodate 6,988 total guests and has 2,300 international crew members, on Tuesday it brought along 4,848 passengers and 2,150 crew members. The ship was built in France and began sailing in March of this year.

V.I. Port Authority Executive Director, Carlton Dowe, thanked Royal Caribbean for the partnership and commitment to the U.S. Virgin Islands. He also highlighted that Royal Caribbean is currently the only cruise line traveling to St. Croix, which Mr. Dowe sees as a testimony to the cruise line's commitment to the territory.

"We look forward to seeing you again, and again and again," Mr. Dowe said during the ceremony where plaques were exchanged. The executive director later told the Consortium that the partnership with Royal Caribbean is projected to see continued growth with more calls both in St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Avery Lewis, St. Thomas-St. John administrator who represented the Department of Tourism and Governor Albert Bryan, welcomed the ship's captain. Mr. Lewis gifted Mr. Hempstead a Cardow watch, a Virgin Islands flag and a bottle of single barrel Cruzan Rum.

Shaun Conner, vice president of the St. Thomas Taxi Association, said it was a pleasure to welcome the ship and be of service to the passengers and crew. He too presented Capt. Hempstead with a plaque as a token of the association's appreciation.

"Your taxis transport our guests and it is a big integral part of our experience here in St. Thomas, so we thank you for that," said Mr. Hempstead.

Rita Meyer, representative for the Virgin Islands Port Services, welcomed the ship and its staff on behalf of the port agents that will assist the ship. She also presented a plaque.

In a brochure provided by Royal Caribbean to members of the media, the cruise line highlighted that onboard the Wonder of the Seas there are 18 total decks, 2,867 state rooms, a suite neighborhood, an aquatheater, casino, mini golf and rock climbing walls as just some of the amenities the ship has to offer.