

Jamaica Sees 1.5 Million Cruise Arrivals in 2019

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Ocho Rios, Jamaica

JAMAICA — Preliminary data from the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) indicates that cruise passengers accounted for over 1.5 million of the approximately 4.3 million tourists visiting the island in 2019, the government of Jamaica has announced.

The figure was disclosed by Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett, who spoke with Jamaica's government-run news organization following last Friday's (January 10) arrival of one of the Norwegian Cruise Line's (NCL) flagship vessels – the 'Norwegian Bliss' – which made its maiden voyage to Jamaica, docking at the Ocho Rios Port.

The minister headed dignitaries and officials welcoming the ship's crew and 5,700 passengers, who each received a complimentary cup of the globally renowned Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee.

The visit marked the second time in as many months that a vessel from a major cruise line was making its inaugural voyage to the island, and Ocho Rios in particular.

The resort town welcomed the “MSC Meraviglia”, which brought 7,200 passengers and crew in December.

In welcoming the figure for cruise passenger arrivals, Mr. Bartlett said this segment of the tourism industry is integral to the Ministry’s overall growth strategy, while highlighting Ocho Rios’ contribution in this regard.

“Ocho Rios has had a phenomenal growth trend for last year, welcoming 197 calls, which represented a passenger count of over 600,000. This has made Ocho Rios the number port for calls in the island,” he outlined, while noting that “there’s more good news” for the town.

“The projection for Ocho Rios, for the first quarter of 2020, is 36 calls that will amount to over 86,000 visitors,” Mr. Bartlett added.

Meanwhile, there is stakeholder concurrence that the Norwegian Bliss’ and MSC Meraviglia’s arrivals have set the stage for a bumper 2019/2020 cruise ship season for the town.

Chairman of the National Cruise Council (NCC) and Mayor of St. Ann’s Bay, Michael Belnavis, said the MSC Meraviglia will be making 10 port calls up to April 2020, “giving Ocho Rios some eye-popping numbers to go along with an already packed itinerary”.

Meanwhile, he described the addition of the Norwegian Bliss as another “feather in the cap” for Ocho Rios, arguing that the town “might easily be enjoying one of its better years in cruise shipping”.

Mr. Belnavis contended that, against this background, “it would not be a stretch to now officially declare the resort town [as] Jamaica’s designated cruise capital”.

“The secret to our success is very simple. We have cleaned up our act to [the point] where the cruise lines are happy with what we have been doing, including our anti-harassment measures,” he outlined.

Additionally, the chairman said “meaningful” employment has been generated for “some of those who were giving problems on the streets”.

Consequently, Mr. Belnavis added, “the guests can now walk the streets freely without being badgered or harassed”.

The Norwegian Bliss is the third ship in the Breakaway Plus-class built by Meyer Weft in Papenburg, Germany, for American cruise operator, NCL.

It is the 16th ship in NCL’s fleet and is home-ported in Miami. Its sister ships include the ‘Norwegian Escape’ and ‘Norwegian Joy’.