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USVI at Forefront of Global Cruise Tourism with 5% Market Share: Bryan Reflects on Seatrade 2024

Strategic initiatives underway to capitalize on the territory's strong position in cruise tourism, which fuels 70% of the economy

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Side by side: Icon of the Seas and Celebrity Apex at the Austin Monsanto Marine Terminal on Jan. 31, 2024. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

At the recent Seatrade Global conference in Miami, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. showcased the Virgin Islands' pivotal role in global cruise tourism, emphasizing the territory's impressive 5 percent share of the market.

During Monday's Government House press briefing, Mr. Bryan reflected on his [recent attendance](#) at the annual event, held from April 8 to 11. The gathering sees executives, stakeholders, and

government officials from across the world discussing trends and partnerships in the cruise industry.

The governor said he had traditionally harbored skepticism about the value of Seatrade but was pleasantly surprised by the productive engagements this year. He met one-on-one with leaders from Disney, Norwegian, MSC, Holland America, Princess Caribbean, and other major cruise lines.

"These discussions were pivotal in some of the decisions we're making to move forward," Mr. Bryan said. "We exchanged a host of innovative ideas that if realized promise to be exciting prospects for our islands, especially the island of St. Croix, where there is the most potential for growth in our cruise industry."

The governor learned that cruising has expanded globally far beyond traditional Mediterranean and Caribbean destinations, with nations like Palau and South Korea now welcoming cruise ships to their shores. Noting the increasing competition from new and customary competitors, Mr. Bryan expressed pride that the Virgin Islands accounts for 5 percent of the global cruise market share, with 1.6 million passengers annually visiting the three islands.

The territory's chief executive commended the efforts of the V.I. Port Authority and V.I. Department of Tourism for their work in enhancing tourism infrastructure. Their continuous improvements, from boardwalks to bathrooms, "add to our product and make us more vital," Mr. Bryan said. Given that tourism generates 70% of the Virgin Islands' economy, "these initiatives and investments are really proving to be worthwhile," he remarked.

This year's Seatrade conference may even be responsible for some legislative changes the governor says are in the pipeline. These aim to further enhance the cruise and tourism offerings, especially potential growth on St. Croix. Governor Bryan also expressed optimism that the exchanges of ideas during the event will lead to "exciting prospects" for the territory through new public-private partnerships.

In summarizing his Seatrade experience, the governor said the global conference "was particularly interesting" and helped provide a first-hand look at how the Virgin Islands markets itself and uses data analytics internationally. He was glad to see the territory's success amid broader tourism growth worldwide.