

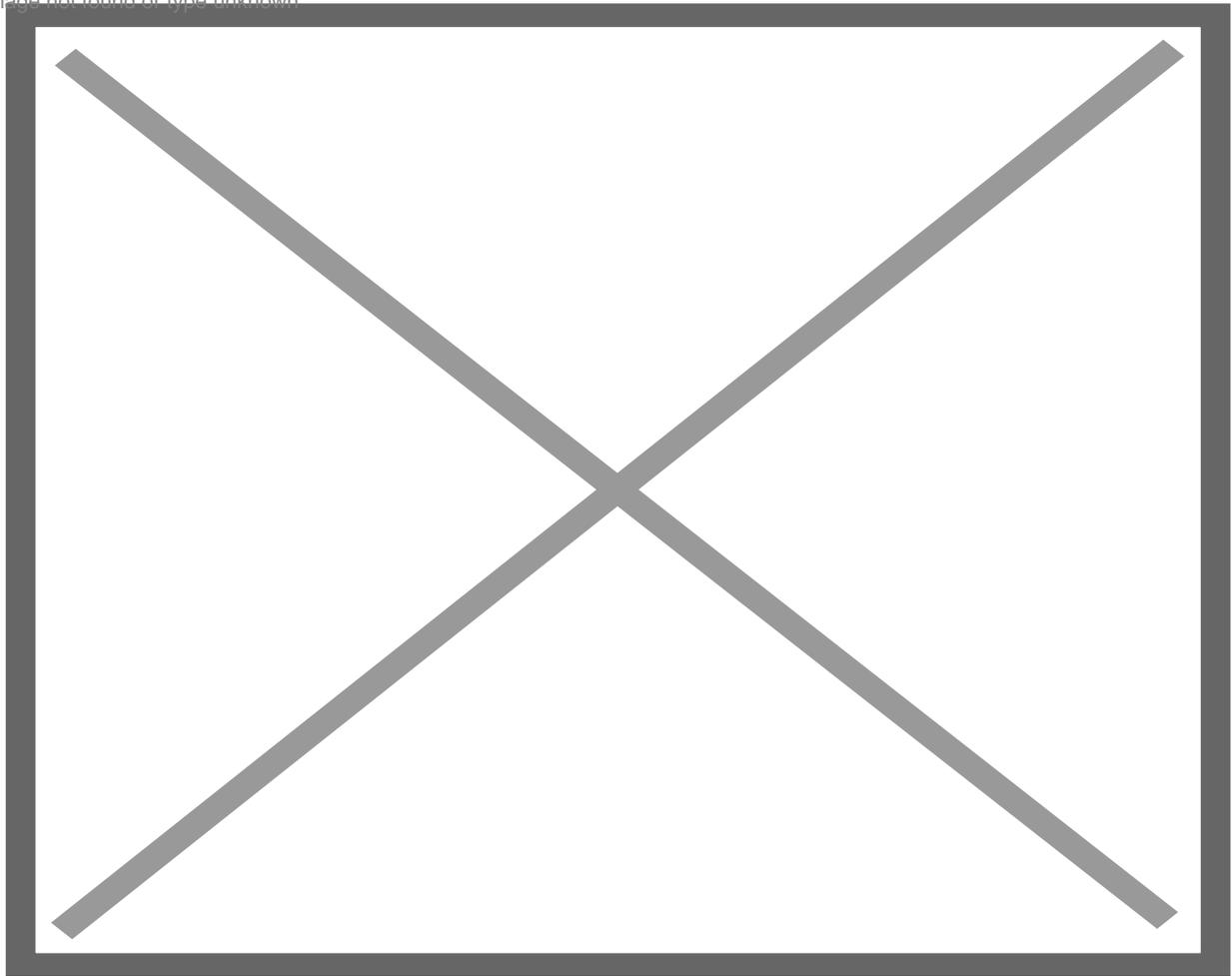
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With Hotel and Cruise Ship Travel Being Hit Hard by Coronavirus Outbreak, V.I. Dept. of Tourism is Said to Be Monitoring Developments

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Three Cruise Ships Docked at WICO in St. Thomas. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ VI CONSORTIUM

One of the hardest struck industries by the coronavirus outbreak is tourism. Airlines have been canceling flights, there has been a nose dive in cruise bookings, and many cruise ships that do set sail are barred from docking at many ports. According to the Wall Street Journal, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. said earlier this month that before the outbreak, it expected 6 percent of its capacity this year to be from cruise ships leaving China. The company has canceled eight China sailings and modified several itineraries that were going through the region. But as the virus has spread to over 46 countries resulting in over 2,800 deaths, the impact to the travel industry has spread

beyond China, with many Caribbean countries now turning back ships once flu-like symptoms are reported.

So far, the U.S. Virgin Islands has not turned away any cruise ship docking at its three main ports: WICO, Crown Bay and the Frederiksted Pier.

The V.I. Department of Tourism said late Thursday that it would continue to closely monitor the worldwide developments surrounding the coronavirus.

D.O.T. representatives are said to be communicating regularly with the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) to keep abreast of the all news related to the spread of the virus, particularly in the Caribbean region. CHTA is working closely with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the regional public health agency for the Caribbean.

"We are also closely collaborating with our fellow government agencies, including the USVI Department of Health, along with the Virgin Islands Port Authority and The West Indian Company Limited," D.O.T. said.

"As expected, we are diligently abiding by all recommendations issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pertaining to the spread of the disease, steps for reporting and evaluating a person under investigation, risk assessment, public health management, and other matters surrounding the virus," the department added.

The department said it's also in regular communication with its travel partners, including the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) and Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), both of which have been proactive in sharing emerging intelligence and updates of the FCCA/CLIA Public Health Policy.

"To date, there are no known cases of COVID-19 in the Caribbean, and we are adhering to the various protocols as advised by CDC and other health authorities," D.O.T. said. "Should there be any reported cases, we are prepared to work with our public health partners and other critical agencies who are trained to implement quarantine and other isolation measures."