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WICO Projects Cruise Passenger Surge in FY2025, Eyes 1 Million Visitors

As the West Indian Company forecasts over 1 million cruise passengers for the upcoming fiscal year, the company aims to bridge the gap to pre-pandemic levels. With 288 ship calls anticipated, St. Thomas stands to gain \$145 million in visitor spending

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A cruise ship docked at the West Indian Company. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Following a successful cruise season in fiscal year 2024, the West Indian Company expects passenger numbers to continue rising in the coming year, bringing the company closer to its pre-pandemic cruise visitor levels.

At WICO's Friday board meeting, [outgoing](#) CEO Anthony Ottley noted that the company received 283 ship calls for the fiscal year which ended on September 30. Those calls delivered 988,862 passengers to the territory, “an increase of over 163,000 passengers as compared to the same time frame last season,” Mr. Ottley told board members.

Forward projections for FY2025 are for 288 ship calls, which would bump passenger numbers to over the 1 million mark. Mr. Ottley ascribed the expectation to the territory's positioning as a leading cruise destination. “Even though all the major lines continue to purchase and develop their own private islands in the region, St. Thomas continues to be a very important call on the itinerary,” he told board members. “We are in a very favorable strategic location, as we are at a viable stop for seven-day cruises out of Florida and for cruises planned for home porting in Puerto Rico,” he continued.

With an average spend per passenger of between \$145 to \$160 per passenger, the business sector on St. Thomas could realize more than \$145 million in revenue from cruise visitors to the island in 2025.

Despite the robust performance this season, passenger numbers have not yet rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. “Prior to Covid, our numbers were between 1.1 to 1.2 million – that's the target that we have now,” Mr. Ottley indicated.

Even when that target is reached, there will still be excess capacity that WICO is looking to fill. Board member Prakash Daswani wondered what strategy the company would employ to attract additional ships on traditionally slower days at the port. “This is a constant discussion that we have with all the cruise lines to get additional ships,” Mr. Ottley responded, noting that there are upcoming meetings scheduled with cruise lines out of the UK, “to see if we can get more cruise lines to come to our shores that originate in Barbados or Martinique.” He anticipated that an increase in home porting out of Puerto Rico would be beneficial to the VI cruise industry as well. “We do see added calls...on Sundays and Mondays coming up,” said Mr. Ottley, noting that these are historically “soft” days for ship visits.

One limiting factor for WICO when it comes to the number of ships that can be accommodated is limited docking capacity. “We're still exploring ways of how we can increase berthing,” Mr. Ottley told board members. “We are having conversations with all the major lines so that we can figure out how we can accommodate as many ships as possible with the limited berthing that we do have.”