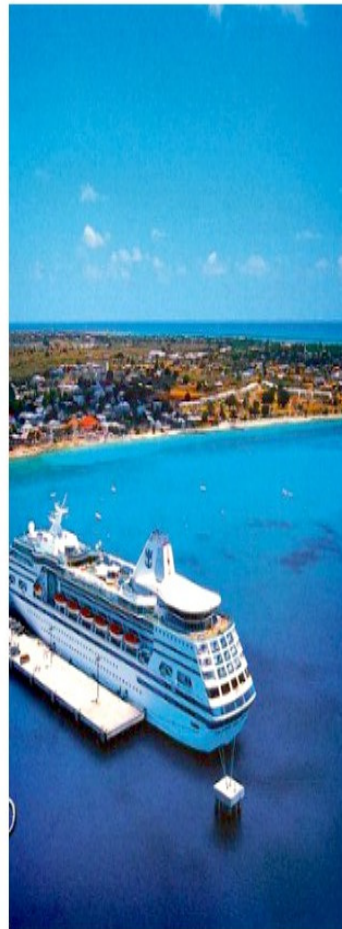


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Taps Disney To Help St. Croix Become A 'Destination Experience'

Business / **Published On March 07, 2015 12:32 AM /**

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A Walt Disney Company official has offered the Virgin Islands government the "full portfolio" of the company's "technical support system" to help create a "destination experience" on St. Croix, Governor Kenneth Mapp said Thursday in his keynote address at the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce's annual meeting held at the Palms at Pelican Cove.

The governor said he had been in conversations with cruise-industry officials, and in a recent meeting with Karl Holz, president of Disney Cruise Line, he asked whether the company had any plans for St. Croix.

In response, Holz, Mapp said, "talked about the issues of the duplication of visits. [He said Disney has] tried St. Croix and there are some issues, in terms of it getting ready and being a fully fledged cruise ship destination."

However, Mapp said he asked Holz to consider including St. Croix on his cruise line's itinerary.

"I said, 'I need help [and] I'm willing to help you [with] the cruise industry, and cruise traffic in the Virgin Islands is essential to our economy, and I'm going to support that, but I need help for where I come from'," the governor explained.

It was after his candid request Mapp said Holz "extended to the people of the Virgin Islands a technical support system."



Governor Kenneth Mapp addressing

members of the St. Croix Chamber of Commerce on Feb. 5

He added: "We're going to be getting together with the Chamber of Commerce and the business community and residents [to identify] what are the things that we need to do to create a destination experience on St. Croix."

The Disney brand spans a range of industries, including movies, music, clothing, live theater and, most important to the territory, cruise ships, and possibly, theme parks. Mapp said the company is best positioned to attract new visitors to the islands' shores.

"There is no brand that I know of that exists on the planet today better than the Disney brand that have been able to successfully achieve experiences for its guests," the governor said. "[Holz] is going to do this gratis -- no cost to this government -- in furtherance of their issues and their concerns and the needs that they have in St. Thomas, to assist this government and this community, to get St. Croix positioned to be a destination with its own identity [and] with its own experiences."

Mapp said when all of the territory is attracting tourists to both visit on a cruise, then plan a return trip for an overnight stay, he would be pleased.

"Because at the end of the day, we don't care if a passenger visits St. Croix and St. Thomas and it's the U.S. Virgin Islands. What we care is that they have very good experiences," he said, adding, "And if they're on St. Croix, and their experiences are uniquely different than that of St. Thomas, but believe that they have not been able to complete their visit and do all that's available for them to do, and they need to fly back and spend time and stay on-island, that's the objective that we want to achieve."

Mapp continued pushing the importance of joining forces with Disney, adding that if the government, community and businesses would partner, much could be achieved.

"My view is we've been kind of prodding along and moving along trying to get this done. I think Disney has been very effective in doing this in their business model. Everything that they may suggest we may not accept and agree, but I believe that they have tremendous resources and they can provide tremendous technical support if we worked as a team -- the community, the government, and the residents, and the businesses -- we would be able to do much for this destination on the island of St. Croix, and again begin the process of growing our economy further, and growing St. Croix's destination," he said.

While tourism is the territory's main and most-lucrative product, Mapp said the destination is losing its edge, and that if something isn't done, it could be lost for good.

"I want to ensure that our single-most important economy in this territory is given the support and direction, and the resources that it needs so that we can grow," he said. "We had a competitive advantage, we're losing it, and if we don't turn the corner, we will lose it."

But Mapp, optimistic and confident in his approach, added, "It will not happen on my watch. So we're going to make sure that the things that need to be done are in fact done."