

The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Florida, Gittens Advocates For More Cruise Ships To St. Croix; Says Cuba Not Immediate Threat

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Kenneth Gittens on Thursday said that the 2016 Seatrade Cruise Global has been a fruitful experience with a number of development opportunities discussed for the territory, according to a press release Mr. Gittens' office issued today. He said the sessions over the past four days focused on the state of the industry and how many of the destinations can revamp their product to make it more appealing.

"Our destination has to be very competitive on the global scene as destinations like Alaska and even Mexico grow in popularity. Panelists, including cruise ship executives and marketing experts, spoke during the workshops and weighed in on opportunities and challenges for growth in the area both as destinations and source markets," Mr. Gittens

said.

According to the release, it was discussed during the conference that by 2021 there will be approximately 50 more cruise ships on the seas around the world, and cruise lines will be looking for additional destinations, primarily in the Caribbean, to frequent with the newer ships. Mr. Gittens said the time is now for our territory to boost our plans, particularly for St. Croix to be on the forefront for consideration as a prime destination.

Other topics at the conference included discussions on how new destinations like Cuba are reshaping itineraries and impacting demand. Discussions with panel members included a detailed examination of the challenges and opportunities for Cuba and the implications of its opening for the region as a whole.

"Surprisingly enough, while Cuba's expansion into the cruise line market and overall tourism scene globally is being looked at as a game changer, it is not a real threat to the territory and other parts of the region. Executives encouraged our destination to continue working on beautifying our already gorgeous ports and focus on safety across the islands," the second-term Democrat said. "We need to focus on the changes in the industry, work on developing our unique attraction and our cultural tourism products and we will certainly be able to outlast the shift in the tides in the tourism market."

Mr. Gittens concluded by stating that in discussions this past week with cruise executives from four major lines, he asked them to consider St. Croix as an alternate destination port in the event of any diversions, to fill the void of steady ship calls this summer or in the future.

Feature Image: From Left, Sen. Gittens and Senator Clifford Graham.

Image Credit: Mr. Gittens' Facebook page.