

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WICO Gives Optimistic Outlook For Cruise Tourism

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ST. THOMAS -- The West Indian Company Limited (WICO) said early Monday it is confident that cruise tourism overall will continue to play a significant role in the overall tourism revenue projections in the territory.

St. Thomas continues to be one of the most requested ports of call by passengers in the Eastern Caribbean, WICO said. This cruise year, WICO will again see new and larger ships making port calls in St. Thomas including the mega-ship Harmony of the Seas, Koningsdam and luxury small vessels such as the Aida Vita and Viking Star.

Earlier this year, in January and again in April, WICO entered into preferred berthing agreements with the Carnival Corporation and Norwegian Caribbean Lines respectively.

Concurrently, the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) entered into a similar berthing agreement with Royal Caribbean International. Additionally, both WICO and VIPA entered into a single tariff agreement.

The current tariff for all ships entering the Port of Charlotte Amalie is now \$13.40 per passenger, an increase of \$2.00 per passenger.

“We are very excited about the future outlook of cruise tourism in the Territory for the next few years,” said Joseph Boschulte, CEO of WICO.

“We have been diligently working to upgrade the dock for our cruise liner partners and to enhance the passenger’s shopping experience with several major, multimillion dollar capital improvement projects. Our dock restoration is underway and when completed, it will be able to accommodate even the largest class of the new cruise liners, and our renovation of Havensight Mall is almost finished.”

WICO has also entered into a \$ 9.7 million contract with the American Bridge Company to complete the final phase of the dock restoration project to extend the life of the pier for at least another 50 years. The project is expected to be completed in March. Despite the construction during the dock restoration, every effort is being made to ensure that the berthing platform is usable, even when three ships are at the berth. After the project is completed, the dock will be able to accommodate all of the largest class of ships.

However, after the dock project has been completed, there will be the remaining issue concerning the ability of the extra large vessels to safely enter and depart from the dock. While the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) is ultimately responsible for the widening of the harbor entrance as well as maintenance dredging of the turning basin, WICO and VIPA have partnered to identify potential funding sources which include restricting a portion of the funds collected for port dues from ships that berth at the WICO facility specifically for these projects, according to the release.

The \$1.8 million Havensight Mall Refurbishment project is expected to be complete by mid-December according to the contractor, AT Construction. WICO will be conducting further discussions with Government Employees' Retirement System (GERS) leadership about additional improvements including restoring the wrought iron exterior fence to create even stronger curb appeal. The Mall refurbishment project will create a modern ambiance for shopping and entertainment for both our residents and cruise ship passengers and crew, WICO said.