

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cruise Lines Applaud Territory's Plans To Boost Industry, D.O.T. Says

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After the first meeting between the newly established Ports of the Virgin Islands - Charlotte Amalie Task Force and the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) in Miami this month, FCCA President Michele Paige applauded public-private cooperation in the U.S. Virgin Islands and welcomed the stakeholders' resolve to build and improve the industry, the Dept. of Tourism has announced.

"After having lengthy discussions with the governor [Kenneth Mapp] in March and sharing some of our concerns, [he] has gone back to the Virgin Islands and created a lot of enthusiasm for change... and things that are good for tourism," said Ms. Paige at Norwegian Cruise Line's offices after the meeting.

Cruise line executives from Carnival, Disney, Holland America Line, MSC Cruises, Norwegian and Royal Caribbean Cruises participated in the meeting.

Public Works Commissioner Gustav James who presented plans for the debut of transportation in the Charlotte Amalie harbor, described the meeting as "very productive," saying, "I was very pleased with the kind of feedback we got from the cruise lines and the other professionals that were in the room - it was a worthwhile trip and it will add to the quality of our RFP (Request for Proposal) and to the results that we will get."

Local entrepreneur Vivek Daswani of Royal Caribbean, Duty-Free Shopping echoed his assessment and thought the cruise lines appreciated the USVI presentation. "They were happy to have us here and (we could) definitely see that there's progress being made on all ends from the cruise line side, as well as our local side," he said. "They seem very enthusiastic (and) very supportive of our initiative, and hopefully we will satisfy them and ourselves and our own community, and do what needs to be done."

D.O.T. Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty thanked the FCCA for its candor, as the USVI recommits to regaining its status as the leading port in the Caribbean with a refreshed product and new experiences for cruise passengers, according to the release.

Cruise line executives will meet with the Virgin Islands community in mid-July for a series of town hall meetings to discuss plans for revitalizing the product and opportunities to increase both cruise passenger and crew disbursements in the territory, the release adds.

The next meeting of the Ports of the Virgin Islands - Charlotte Amalie Task Force will be held in June.

"We must address the concerns raised by our cruise partners," said Mrs. Nicholson-Doty, who explained that it is a priority to improve infrastructure, implement harbor transportation and update product offerings, such as tours and shopping. "If we are not enhancing our product, we will continue to lose ground," she explained, noting that declining cruise numbers are an indication of the territory's missteps while other destinations have emerged in the region. "This is fixable, but it will take a concerted public and private sector commitment to change - thankfully, we are moving in the right direction."

Members of the task force at the meeting included Mrs. Nicholson-Doty; Gustav James; the commissioner designee of Property and Procurement, Lloyd Bough Jr.; the West Indian Company's (WICO) outgoing CEO Joseph Boschulte and incoming CEO Clifford Graham; Design Program Manager of the Department of Public Works Jomo McClean; and local businesspeople Richard Berry of West Indies Corporation and Daswani.