

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With U.S. Tourists Barred From Visiting Cuba By State Department, Tourism Works With Cruise Lines To Add Calls To USVI

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Following the U.S. government's renewed restrictions on travel to Cuba, the U.S. Virgin Islands government is working closely with the cruise lines to help them as they race to rework their itineraries, the Department of Tourism said Wednesday.

The State Department announced this week that the United States would no longer permit visits to Cuba via passenger and recreational vessels, including cruise ships and yachts, nor on private and corporate aircraft.

Joseph Boschulte, D.O.T. commissioner designee, said that since news of the policy shift, the Ports of the Virgin Islands has reached out to the cruise lines to offer inconvenienced passengers the opportunity to visit the territory, including the less busy cruise destination of St. Croix.

"We have been in contact with the lines about making calls to both St. Croix and St. Thomas," said Mr. Boschulte, who let executives know that the territory's ports can accommodate diverted vessels on short notice.

"We have the capacity and are encouraging the lines to experience St. Croix especially - an emerging tourism destination steeped in rich culture and heritage and whose stakeholders are prepared to provide a welcoming experience for cruise ship passengers," he said.

Mr. Boschulte said the Ports of the Virgin Islands will closely monitor the impact of the new policy and explore solutions with cruise lines at next week's Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association's Platinum Associate Member Advisory Council Conference, taking place in St. Maarten.

According to the Wall Street Journal, the new regulation eliminates a category of travel used by most Americans not of Cuban descent to visit the island.

The new regulations are designed to dry up revenue from visitors to the island, one of Cuba's few sources of foreign exchange, in a bid to spark political change in the hemisphere's lone communist country, the Journal said.

The move is likely to have a major economic impact in Cuba, whose economy is already reeling from decreased economic aid from Havana's main ally, Venezuela, and previous moves by the Trump administration to squeeze the island's vital tourism industry.