

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory Strengthens Bond With Cruise Lines, Prepares For Strong Growth Forecast, Dept. of Tourism Says

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The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to strengthen its relationship with cruise line partners as the region prepares for the strong growth forecast for the cruise ship industry, the Department of Tourism announced Sunday.

Speaking at the annual Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Cruise Conference and Trade Show, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. reported that the delegation gathered much valuable information about the evolving form of the massive cruise industry.

The governor added that the USVI delegation, which included Commissioner of Tourism Joseph Boschulte, his team at the Department of Tourism and representatives from The West Indian Company Limited and the Virgin Islands Port Authority, was so well briefed by the cruise industry leaders that they can confidently plan how the territory should further respond to the needs of the changing marine sector.

Underscoring the timeliness of the meetings, Mr. Bryan said that with friendly competition throughout the region and the world, the face-to-face sessions were "a good checkup on our health to see what we're doing right and most importantly, what we're not doing enough of."

Sustained infrastructural investment was continuing apace, stated Mr. Bryan, adding that dredging projects, the addition of a new port in the Charlotte Amalie harbor, the improvements on Main Street and the upland plans for Crown Bay were important developments for ensuring the Virgin Islands product was trending alongside cruise sector growth.

The territory's leader also stressed the importance of regional collaboration with its neighbors, according to the D.O.T. release. The USVI delegation attended the meeting alongside several Caribbean heads of government, including Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, British Virgin Islands Premier Andrew Fahie, and Prime Minister of St. Lucia Allen Chastanet.

Mr. Bryan said areas of opportunity include responding to demand from the European market as well as revitalizing the visitor experience. He also said it was important to collaborate with the federal authorities: "Working through our visa issues with the U.S. Government to allow those (international) passengers to disembark very quickly and enjoy our islands, brings a whole new flock of tourists that have never been (to the USVI) for the first time, not only to enjoy their daytime experience but to come back again and enjoy overnight stays," he said.

The governor also referred to the need to rebalance the industry: "We have a very mature tourism product in St. Thomas and we have an emerging market in St. Croix (and) St. John. (We must determine) how do we combine those things in the right way that not only gives us the spend that we want, but also attracts the type of customer that's going to have the vacation that they want in the U.S. Virgin Islands."

According to D.O.T., during the convention, representatives from Coral World Ocean Park, Cruise Ship Excursions, Island Networks, Leatherback Brewing Company, Pirates Treasure Museum, Skyride To Paradise Point, and the Virgin Islands 'Bush Tea Lady', featured their products and attractions. Mr. Boschulte led an interactive session with Virgin Islands operators and cruise line executives to help strengthen the bonds between the cruise industry and the territory's private sector.

"We are very satisfied with our progress on bolstering this very important cruise pillar," the commissioner stated, thanking private sector partners and especially his tourism team for all that they do in delivering an exceptional experience to visitors to the territory. "We have a lot of work to do, and look forward to elevating our game in the weeks and months ahead."

Feature Image: Orlando Ashford, President of Holland America Line (second from right), talks cruise tourism with (pictured clockwise) Commissioner Boschulte, WICO board member Jason Charles, and Governor Bryan. (Credit: D.O.T.)

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