

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Carnival Breeze Brings 3,700 Tourists to St. Croix During Maiden Call; Senators, Tourism Officials Want to See More

Business / **Published On November 07, 2019 11:06 AM /**

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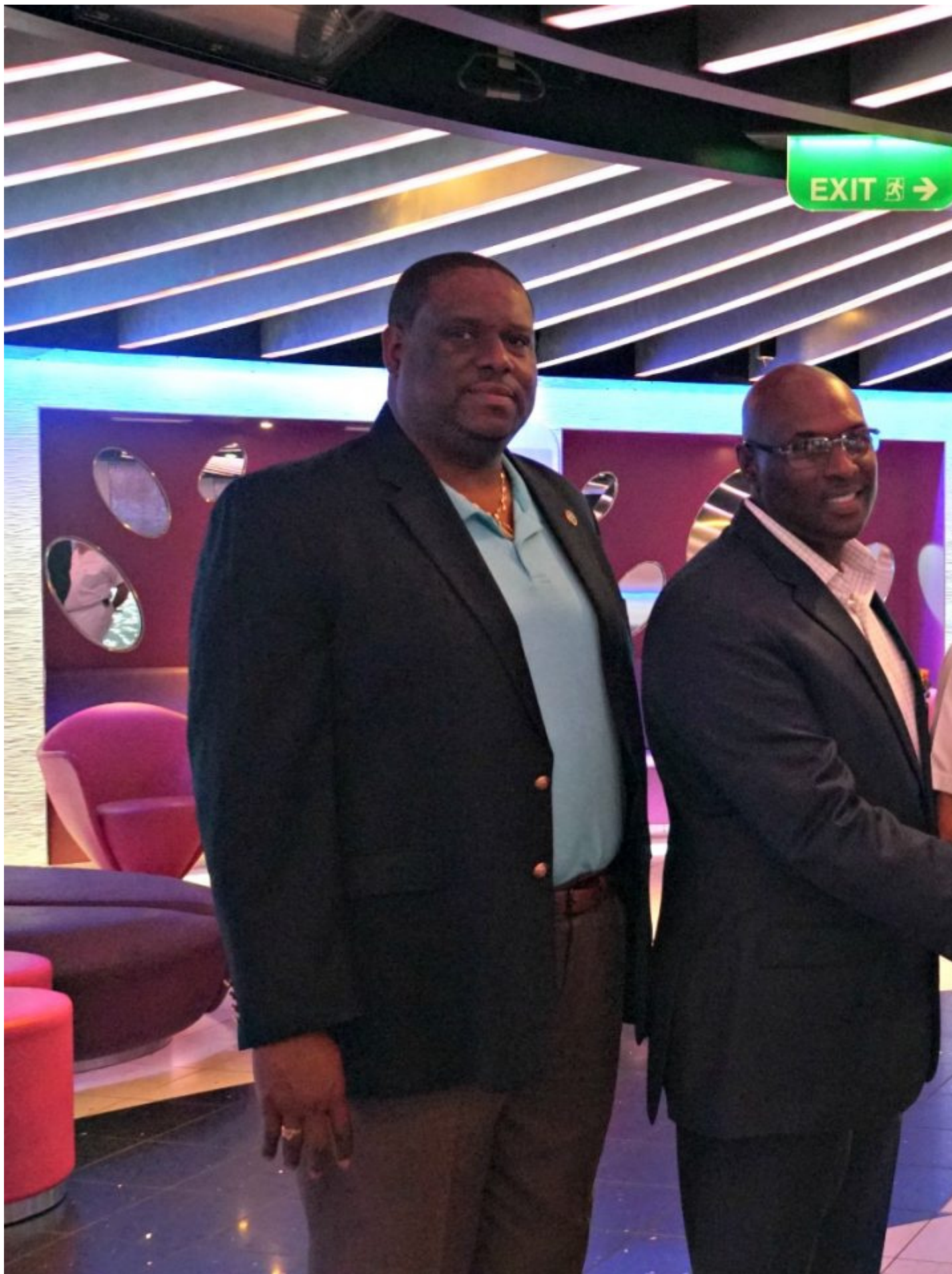


ST. CROIX -- Carnival Breeze made its maiden call to St. Croix on Tuesday in grand fashion. The cruise ship was carrying 3,700 passengers and an additional 1,400 crew and staff, making it among the larger vessels to dock at the Frederiksted Pier.

The local government marked the inaugural call with a special ceremony aboard the ship, which included senators and officials from the Department of Tourism and Government House.

The ship's captain, Rocco Lubrano, said its passengers were really enjoying their stop on St. Croix, and revealed that Carnival Breeze is scheduled to return to the big island in January.

Senators Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet and Kenneth Gittens attended the event, all expressing their desire to see ships on St. Croix more often. While the territory is a mainstay for cruise ships in the Caribbean, a vast majority of the calls are in St. Thomas. The St. Croix lawmakers want to see an increase -- no less than 100 calls a year, said Mr. Vialet -- to the big island.



From left to right: Senators Kenneth Gittens and Novelle Francis, Carnival Breeze Captain

Rocco Lubrano, Dept. of Tourism Assistant Commissioner Elizabeth Watley, St. Croix Administrator Sammuel Sanes, and Senator Kurt Vialet (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

"I really think that we need to work hard in developing the cruise lines coming to the historic port of Frederiksted," Mr. Vialet said. "This year we only have twenty plus visits; I'm a bit disappointed that we have not been able to lure more ships, but I think we need to come up with a comprehensive plan as to how we're going to have that discussion with the cruise lines in order to get them to commit to the historic town of Frederiksted." The senator was grateful for Carnival's return to St. Croix though, and said another Carnival ship visit was planned for today.

For Senate President Francis, the return of Carnival to St. Croix represents an important step in the ongoing effort to improve economic activity on St. Croix and more pointedly, Frederiksted. The lawmaker also highlighted the territory's responsibility -- both government and the people -- in making sure cruise tourists' experience on the island is pleasantly memorable.

"I want to take this opportunity to ask our community to also be the ambassadors. As we have these cruise passengers in town, make sure they are well protected, and make sure that we show a good face in terms of what St. Croix represents," Mr. Francis said, noting that the best -- and also most damaging -- marketing come from guests who have visited a destination.



A view of Fort Frederik from atop the Carnival Breeze (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

Mr. Gittens spoke of the importance of cruise ship visitors to the St. Croix economy. "I always say whatever benefits the St. Croix economy benefits the Virgin Islands economy."

He added, "But one of the things that we really have to remember is that we have to make sure that the passengers have such a good experience that they want to come back again to our shores."

Mr. Gittens said a number of ship captains have described the Frederiksted Pier as being one of -- if not best port -- in the Caribbean. "When they pull in to our shores here at Frederiksted, they're flanked on the left and on the right by our beautiful beach shorelines."

Mr. Gittens noted, however, that activities for tourists are crucial in the plan to revitalize cruise tourism on St. Croix, "So that the experience for these passengers can be first-rate that they would want to return to the territory, this time by plane and even encourage others to come back to our shores," he said.

Dept. of Tourism Assistant Commissioner Elizabeth Watley described the ability to attract more cruise ships to St. Croix as enormously important. "We want to keep St. Croix out there (with) a competitive edge. And yes, St. Thomas is doing well, but St. Croix is also part of the U.S. Virgin Islands and gives something that the industry is now looking for -- which is that authentic experience. So that is amazing to show the world that the USVI has multiple things to offer and not just one product," she said.

Cruise executives gave the local delegation a thorough tour of the ship -- including its theaters, restaurants, dining and other locations.