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Celebrity Edge Becomes First Cruise Ship To Dock in USVI Since the Onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Mocko Jumbies, local tourism officials greet passengers of the Celebrity Edge cruise ship at Crown Bay in St. Thomas on Tues. July 6, 2021. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — The Crown Bay Marina was described by leaders of the territory as a welcome sight on Tuesday as the Celebrity Edge — the first cruise ship to arrive in the U.S. Virgin Islands since the Center for Disease Control and Prevention issued a No Sail Order in March of 2020 — docked with approximately 1,562 passengers who were greeted by live steel pan music, dancers and Mocko Jumbies. The ship also had 982 crew members.

Approximately 97 percent of the visitors were vaccinated, stated V.I. Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe. Speaking to the Consortium following the ship's arrival, he said, "I am very elated today, the people of the Virgin Islands should be very happy as well. I'm really excited for the territory.. I really appreciate the fact that we can be here today celebrating the Celebrity Edge." The Crown Bay Marina, unlike WICO, is managed by VIPA.

Mr. Dowe stressed the importance of keeping people safe by following protocols, and added that he expects Frederiksted, St. Croix to see its first cruise ship since the No Sail Order in August.



Cruise ship tourists were greeted by steel pan music, dancers and Mocko Jumbies at Crown Bay on Tuesday. (Credit: Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)

Pash Daswani, president of the Indian Association of the VI, said the arrival of cruise ships back to the USVI after sixteen months represented an important day for businesses that depend on tourism. "We haven't seen a ship in sixteen months and this is an amazing, amazing day today that we can welcome Captain Kate and the Celebrity Edge," he said. "It's an unbelievable feeling to see 1,500 people flow through our streets and the Crown Bay area. It's obviously going to be money for the island; it's just good to be back on some form of normalcy, so to speak."

Former Senator Celestino White, a member of the Port Authority's Governing Board, expressed similar sentiments. He said seeing the Celebrity Edge at Crown Bay "is certainly a good feeling... people of the Virgin Islands should look at this as a welcome sight. The tourism industry has always been a mainstay to the economy of the U.S. Virgin Islands."

Mr. White spoke of Governor Albert Bryan's role in the return of cruise ships. "His steadfastness and his communication on a continued basis, the governor with the cruise line industry, understanding all the different protocols that the cruise ship industry had put in place and indeed as a result of the governor, through the Department of Health, through the Department of Tourism and through the outstanding leadership of Port Authority's Carlton Dowe, has been able to make the cruise line industry as a whole feel comfortable."



A "Welcome to St. Thomas"-themed VI flag is painted on the floor at the dock entrance at Crown Bay. (Credit: Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)

Speaking during his weekly press briefing, Mr. Bryan stated, "We are so proud today to take another step closer to normalcy and towards getting our economy back to full strength."

Mr. Bryan said the press conference was delayed by 30 minutes because of his excitement, and that he wanted to meet the ship's captain. "I was very delighted to go on down and meet the captain today... I just had to make sure we go down there," he said.

Even so, the governor added a note of caution relative to Covid-19 and encouraged everyone to remain vigilant. "While this is welcomed for our vendors, taxi drivers, local small businesses that depend on the tourist traffic, our success depends on how well we each adhere to our Covid policy and to the health guidelines that are put before us, and how many of us are vaccinated against the virus," the governor said.

During a short presentation on the cruise ship dock, Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte welcomed ship Captain Kate McCue. "It's good to have you back, it's a wonderful sight to see this ship here today. Thank you for coming to us," he said.

Speaking to Capt. McCue, Shaine Gaspard, president of the St. Thomas-St. John Chamber of Commerce, stated, "The business community is excited to celebrate this day with you. A lot of good people did a lot of hard work to make this day happen."



Center, VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe, on his left, Celebrity Edge Captain Kate McCue, on Mr. Dowe's right, Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte. (Credit: Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)

Mr. Daswani also expressed gratitude to Capt. McCue. "It's been horrible for the Caribbean that we haven't seen a ship in town and I'm so glad you are here. Welcome to our beautiful home and thank you so much."

Speaking at the presentation, Capt. McCue shared her thoughts on what it means to be back in the U.S. Virgin Islands. "This is a long awaited visit... we are so honored to be the first back to the islands. We've been looking forward to this... On behalf of the entire Celebrity Edge Crew, Celebrity Cruises — we want to say thank you for welcoming us with open arms this first call and all of the future calls. Not only for our ship but the entire cruise industry in the beautiful U.S. Virgin Islands."

Mr. Dowe, the Port Authority's executive director, thanked his employees, Commissioner of Health Justa Encarnacion, Attorney General Denise George, the Office of the Governor, Mr. Boschulte, the port's marine manager and the Virgin Islands Port Authority Board of Directors.

"Because you see the end result but the work that went in to get us here" was a coordinated, dedicated effort," Mr. Dowe said. "It is an exciting day."