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Norwegian Gem Becomes First Cruise Ship To Dock At WICO Since March 2020

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The Norwegian Gem docked at WICO on Sept. 8, 2021, becoming the first cruise ship to call at the port since March 2020. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — Cruise ship visitors on Wednesday disembarked from the Norwegian Gem at the WICO dock in Havensight for the first time since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic last March. They were greeted by the sounds local music and a festive atmosphere with V.I. Dept. of Tourism dancers and Moko Jumbies.

The welcome event was organized by D.O.T., whose director of visitor experience Angela Payne said it was great to have visitors back in the U.S. Virgin Islands. "It was an amazing day here today at Havensight for the Norwegian Gem coming into the ports of W.I.C.O.," she said. "We are

so happy, the folks were happy, they were happy with the entertainment, they were just so happy to be back in the Virgin Islands and I am so happy to see them.”

The ship included 1,349 fully vaccinated passengers and 1,059 crew members. Norwegian Cruise Line recently announced a 100 percent vaccination policy for passengers and crew, exceeding the USVI 85 percent requirement, according to WICO.

Mr. Ottley presented Captain Kim Karlsson with a USVI Welcome Bag at a brief and subdued outdoor event at which safety protocols were observed.

In a press release before the ship's arrival, Anthony A. Ottley, WICO president and CEO stated, "It is an understatement to say that we are elated to now welcome our first ship after more than eighteen months of inactivity."

In the same release, D.O.T. Commissioner and WICO Board Chairman Joseph B. Boschulte said ships returning to WICO represents a positive step for the USVI economy. "Now that there is a path forward for the cruise industry to resume sailing safely, it is significant that we will once again have cruise ships at the territory's three major cruise ports, and it is especially gratifying to see ships berthed at our port."

"Our overnight guest arrivals have been impressive, but we certainly cannot overlook cruise tourism's contributions to our economy, even with ships arriving below capacity," Mr. Boschulte added.

Two taxi drivers spoke to the Consortium regarding the return of cruise ships at WICO. "It's something good for the economy, it's something good for business... it keeps funds flowing," one driver said.

The other driver stated, "We are glad to see ships returning, which again helps each and every one of us, especially us that are taxi drivers."

Two new ships, MSC's Seashore (November 14th) and Carnival Cruise Line's Mardi Gras (December 23rd) are expected to be among the 211 cruise calls scheduled for the upcoming 2022 ship season, WICO said.

On July 6, the V.I. Port Authority [welcomed the first cruise ship](#) to dock in the USVI since March 2020, when VIPA welcomed the Celebrity Edge to Crown Bay.