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## Viking Orion Cruise Ship Returns to WICO After Pandemic-Induced Pause

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**Viking Cruise Ship** By. GETTY IMAGES

ST. THOMAS — The Viking Orion cruise ship docked at WICO in St. Thomas on Sunday, with the 930-passenger cruise ship berthing at 40 percent capacity and marking the line's return to the U.S. Virgin Islands since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Aboard the Orion were 368 guests and 410 crew members. St. Thomas was the last stop on the ship's two-week, eight-stop excursion before returning to Ft. Lauderdale.

"It is a pleasure to welcome Viking back", Anthony A. Ottley, WICO president and CEO said during the traditional welcome and plaque exchange ceremony with Captain Richard Svardmark. "For most ports, large ships are the bread and butter, but the smaller ships, are the cherry on top."

V.I. Department of Tourism Director of Visitor Experience, Angela Payne, along with Virgin Port Services' Rita Mayer and Wendy Erving, also presented gifts to Captain Svardmark assisted by Orion's General Manager Tom Aberg.

At 745 feet, the small-ship class vessel carries up to 930 guests, all of whom are required to be vaccinated against Covid-19. Its arrival in St. Thomas marks the continued return of cruise ships to the territory, after a 15-month hiatus owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Cruise lines began returning in July 2021.

V.I. Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte continues to be optimistic about long-term forecasts for the eventual return of cruise ship arrivals to the territory. “Slowly but surely we will get back to our pre-pandemic numbers, and we’re so grateful to our cruise partners for working with us to help us get there. We’re glad to see St. Thomas is still a top destination for cruise passengers, and we look forward to continuing to improve our cruise product,” he noted.

The commissioner recently attended the 35th edition of Seatrade Cruise Global in Miami, where he spoke of the need for broad collaboration to ensure health and safety protocols are met at each stop on every cruise itinerary. Explaining that “one destination does not make an itinerary,” the commissioner urged Caribbean cruise destinations and cruise line partners to work more closely together.

During the gathering of cruise industry stakeholders, representatives of the U.S. Virgin Islands Port Authority and Royal Caribbean Group [signed a memorandum of understanding](#) for the development of the cruise industry in the territory.