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Celebrity Apex's First Voyage to Territory Highlights Growing Relationship Between USVI and Royal Caribbean

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Gov. Albert Bryan, center, VIPA Exec. Dir. Carlton Dowe, center left, pose for a photo during a presentation ceremony for Celebrity Apex's first voyage to the USVI on Sun., Nov. 7, 2021. By. KYLE MURPHY/ VI CONSORTIUM

ST. THOMAS — The Celebrity Apex made its first stop in the Virgin Islands on Sunday when it arrived at Austin “Babe” Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay. The vessel was greeted by a delegation of Virgin Islands leaders including Governor Albert Bryan and Virgin Islands Port Authority Director Carlton Dowe.

The delegation exchanged gifts with Apex Captain Dimitris Kafetzis, and spoke highly about the growing relationship between Royal Caribbean and the Virgin Islands. During the presentation, Mr. Dowe said, "We have forged a serious relationship with Royal Caribbean, we expect that to grow; the proof is in the pudding."

Mr. Dowe said there will be four Royal Caribbean cruise ship visits to the territory this week including the Celebrity Equinox, which will dock in Frederiksted on Wednesday. "That says a lot about the commitment Royal has made to its partnership with the territory," the VIPA executive director said. He expects to see an increase in cruise ship visits from Royal Caribbean in both St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Mr. Bryan saw the growing number of cruise ship arrivals to the USVI as another sign of the return to normalcy in the territory. "It is a long-term relationship with Royal Caribbean, but every single day we move a step closer to normalcy here in the islands," he said.



High view of the Celebrity Apex's first voyage to the USVI at the Austin "Babe" Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay. (Credit: Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)

During an interview with the Consortium following the presentation event, Mr. Bryan spoke to the impact the return of this portion of the tourism industry has had on the economy. "The return of cruise ships has been so seamless that the community is kind of ignoring the fact that they are back in play, but certainly our restaurants, our jewelry stores and our excursion and taxi drivers are appreciating the fact that we now have tourists in town," he said.

Mr. Dowe told the Consortium that since cruise ships started returning in July, the Virgin Islands has seen over 50,000 passengers with over 98 percent of those visitors fully vaccinated. "We are glad that we can see that," he said.

Pash Daswani, president of the Indian Association of the VI and local jewelry store owner, spoke on behalf of the retail community, stating, "You have no idea how it makes me feel to see ships, especially of this caliber, on our shores."

Mr. Kafetzis, the Apex cruise ship captain, revealed that his initial voyage to the Virgin Islands was in 1989, a trip that left fond memories of the territory — especially an excursion to Magens Bay.

The Celebrity Apex is an Edge-class cruise ship operated by Celebrity Cruises, a subsidiary of Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd, according to V.I.P.A. It was built in France and is the second vessel in the company's Edge class of ships, following the delivery of her sister ship, Celebrity Edge, in 2018.

The ship has a capacity of 3,405 and 1,320 crew. However, due to Covid-19 sailing restrictions, it arrived at approximately half of its capacity, said V.I.P.A. All Celebrity brand cruise ships have 100 percent of their crew vaccinated and about 97 percent of their passengers are vaccinated.