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St. Croix to Receive 140,000 Visitors in 2023 in Tripling of Cruise Ship Calls to Island, St. Thomas Gets 300,000 Additional Visitors as Royal Caribbean and Port Authority Strengthen Relationship

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A Royal Caribbean cruise ship was the first to dock at the Frederiksted Pier following 18 months of closure as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

MIAMI, FLORIDA, SEATRADE — The U.S. Virgin Islands will receive an additional 440,000 cruise ship visitors in 2023 from Royal Caribbean, as the cruise line and the V.I. Port Authority [on Tuesday announced major increases in voyages](#) to the U.S. territory that further strengthens their longstanding relationship.

Of the 440,000 visitors coming on a variety of Royal Caribbean ships, St. Croix will receive 140,000 visitors in 2023 — an almost tripling of the current annual total — while St. Thomas, one of the Caribbean's most popular destinations, will see an additional 300,000, a 70 percent increase, according to Royal Caribbean and VIPA officials.

The major announcement, which has great implications for St. Croix's tourism product and stands to transform the commerce landscape on the island, was made Tuesday at Seatrade Cruise Global at the U.S. Virgin Islands booth, where both VIPA and Royal Caribbean executives were present.

The announcement builds upon last year's memorandum of understanding for a multi-year port development deal between VIPA and Royal Caribbean for enhancements at the Austin Monsanto Marine Facility in Crown Bay, St. Thomas and the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility in Frederiksted, St. Croix. Today, Royal Caribbean officials said steady progress has been made on that agreement.

Jayne Halcomb, Royal Caribbean's Director of Destination Development for the Caribbean and the Americas, announced the increased calls. "We are thrilled with what we've been working on for short and long-term goals, and we're so excited to announce the additional passenger volume to the USVI starting next year," she said.

Along with the additional guests to St. Croix and St. Thomas, a new package aimed at diversifying the offering in the St. Thomas-St. John District will see 400 passengers every two weeks being taken directly from the ship docked at the Austin Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay and brought to St. John. "So all three islands will be benefiting as a result of this relationship," said VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe.

Mr. Dowe, known for getting things done, spoke about the importance of nurturing relationships with partners. "None of this could happen without working on and developing true partnerships," he said of the relationship with Royal Caribbean. Mr. Dowe also thanked a gamut of individuals from friendly competitors the West Indian Company to vendors and VIPA board members. Even the V.I. Police Commissioner, Ray Martinez was recognized for the indelible role of safety the VIPD plays in the tourism industry.

Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte expressed gratitude to Royal Caribbean while congratulating VIPA for its efforts. He also recalled the cruise industry's dominant share of visitors before the Covid-19 pandemic. "It has for as long as I've been around played a major role" in the territory's tourism product, he said.

VIPA board Chairman Willard John expressed excitement on behalf of the board for the considerable increase in calls to St. Croix. Mr. John also spoke about the importance of preparing for the huge influx of guests to ascertain visitor experience is satisfactory.

"We are going to be planning a series of inter-agency meetings as well as the private industry — all the stakeholders — so that we can look at what these numbers look like and how we can best accommodate them," he said. "We particularly want to meet with taxi drivers to make sure they have the capacity to deal with the passengers, as well as the proper training. So all these things are going to be in place; we're going to meet immediately to make sure that we are able to accept our guests."

Governor Albert Bryan, who spoke to the Consortium in a phone interview following the press event, said the investments being made in both Frederiksted and Christiansted will compliment the increase in passengers. "For the territory it just means more and more for our economy — we're

doing extremely well now," he said.

"We have a lot of things planned for Frederiksted next year. The [Tender Pier expansion](#), the [finishing of the Paul E. Joseph Stadium](#), the Frederiksted Pool," Mr. Bryan continued, calling out a number of projects that are ongoing while speaking of more to come.

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