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Visitor Increase from 40,000 to 140,000 on St. Croix Begins Nov. 2 as Port Authority, Royal Caribbean Make Agreement Official

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Local executives, including VIPA Director Carlton Dowe (sitting, center), and Gov. Albert Bryan (standing, center), join RCG execs., including Jayne Halcomb (sitting, right), during a signing ceremony on Oct. 4, 2022. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

During an event fittingly held at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility on St. Croix (the Frederiksted Pier) Tuesday, V.I. Port Authority and Royal Caribbean Group officials signed an agreement that increases RCG cruise ship passengers to the island from 40,000 to 140,000 annually beginning this November.

They also signed an agreement to extend through December an existing Memorandum of Understanding to continue discussions for plans of improvements and upgrades at the Austin Monsanto Marine Facility in Crown Bay, St. Thomas and the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility. The MOU was originally signed in 2021 in Florida during Seatrade Cruise Global, the cruise industry's leading annual business-to-business event.

The changes strengthen the commitment by RCG to build on the territory's standing as a marquee destination for Caribbean cruising and to increase visitor arrivals.

“[Over a year ago](#), most of this group here traveled to Seatrade in Miami and had discussions with Royal Caribbean and those discussions led us to sign some agreements and today we're here to further extend those agreements,” said VIPA Executive Director Carlton Dowe.

The renewed agreement will also increase the passenger fees paid to the Port Authority by incoming Royal Caribbean cruise ships from \$5.00 to \$7.00, beginning January 2023.

“For over 25 years there was no fee charged to cruise ships coming to St. Croix, and with the first agreement Royal Caribbean agreed that that was not fair and they negotiated with us, and we started off with \$5 per passenger coming to St. Croix and we appreciated that... With the new agreement we asked them for a little something, so we got a another little something,” he explained. The \$2 increase is notable, said Governor Albert Bryan, adding that the amount represents a 40 percent increase.

“Tourism is our bread and butter and my commitment is to be the best,” Mr. Bryan said as he gave remarks during the signing ceremony. He also spoke of the great relationship the territory has with Royal Caribbean and vowed to continue the mutually beneficial agreement as long as he is governor.

According to Mr. Dowe, the agreements were a collaborative effort between the Port Authority, the Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation, as well as the executive and the legislative branches of government, remarking, “While we're doing it for the visitors, everybody benefits from what we do.”

Mr. Dowe praised the cruise company for its diligence and assistance throughout the years, telling those gathered that “Royal Caribbean has been consistent, never stopped coming to St. Croix.”

Jayne Halcomb, RCG's director of destination development said the event was important as it further cements the parties' relationship to enhance the tourism offering on St. Croix. She said Royal Caribbean has been in discussions with the Dept. of Sports, Parks and Recreation to develop new visitor experiences to the islands. According to Ms. Halcomb, while hundreds of thousands already visit the USVI and enjoy their experience, "our goal is to build upon that and triple the number of guest passengers that come here, and almost double the number of actual calls that come here," she said, referring to St. Croix. "And we want to make sure that they're continuing to have an amazing experience and building upon that."

A timeline of November 2nd was given as the date to witness the anticipated growth in cruise tourism.

The signing took place at the Frederiksted Pier. Improvements will include disabled restrooms, outside showers, food tours, and repair to the boardwalk.