

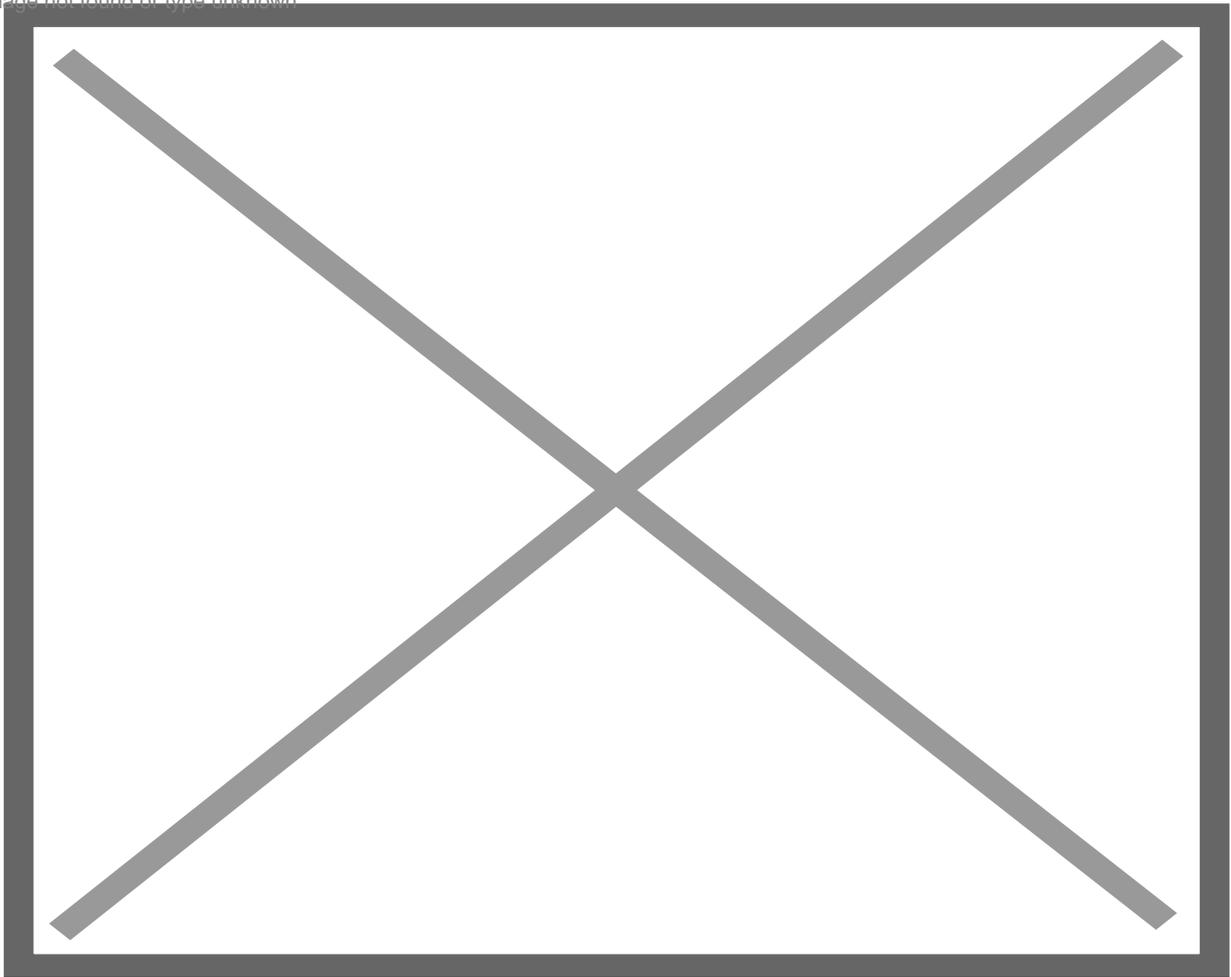
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Canceled Performances, Changed Venues, Travel Headaches: Biden's Presence on St. Croix Affects Festivities

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Air Force One at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on Mon. Jan. 2, 2023. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

For many attendees of the opening night of this year's Crucian Christmas Festival Village, Cool Sessions Brass was supposed to be the main highlight of the show. But the band did not perform as some key members were stuck in St. Thomas and could not travel to St. Croix — a result of stringent security protocols put in place for President Joe Biden, who is vacationing on the island.

It was one of several cancellations or location changes for the festival season on St. Croix, leading to reduced attendance and other scheduling headaches.

Private jets flying between St. Thomas and St. Croix must first travel to Puerto Rico and go through TSA in San Juan before heading to their destination as part of the temporary flight restrictions. For Cool Sessions Brass, some members made it to St. Croix while others were left in St. Thomas and plans for another flight to carry the remaining members to St. Croix were eventually abandoned.

A breakfast fete event scheduled to take place on the St. Croix Bypass Saturday morning had to be moved to Frederiksted because of Biden's presence on St. Croix's east end.

On Sunday, Latin Night at the Festival Village was greatly impacted by the president's travel security protocol, with two of the main bands from Puerto Rico unable to make it.

Yet even with the inconveniences, Mr. Biden's presence on St. Croix as president of the United States has provided the island with a level of exposure that can't be purchased. The large U.S. media outlets traveling with the president as part of the White House Press Corps has been publishing stories about the president's time on The Big Island, as St. Croix is called, providing promotion that would otherwise be costly for the V.I. Dept. of Tourism.

Governor Albert Bryan recently spoke of the impact of the president's presence. "You know the good thing is to come and see Air Force One at our airport. That is amazing; it blows my mind when I say that. St. Croix, you can't buy that kind of publicity. If it's good enough for the president of the United States, people are like, 'what am I missing,'" the governor said.

Mr. Biden, who has been spending the year-end holidays on St. Croix — a tradition that precedes his presidency — is scheduled to leave the island today.