

# Cruise Lines and Destinations Route Mutual Success at the FCCA Cruise Conference & Trade Show in St. Maarten

MIRAMAR, FL, UNITED STATES, November 1, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The cruise industry was anchored in St. Maarten last week, with 670 destination stakeholders and nearly 100 cruise line executives gathering for the only official cruise conference and trade show taking place in and representing the Caribbean and Latin America: the 30th Annual [Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association \(FCCA\)](#) Cruise Conference & Trade Show.

"I want to applaud everyone throughout stunning St. Maarten, 'the Friendly Island,' for coordinating this successful event while showcasing the destination's friendliness and hospitality, along with displaying their commitment and ability to grow cruise tourism," said Michele Paige, FCCA CEO. "It was also humbling to see the cruise executives' historic belief in our mission to link stakeholders and cruise lines to develop mutual benefits, proven by the event's record number of one-on-one meetings."

Taking place October 22-25, the event featured its secret recipe of workshops, meetings, and networking functions for the attendees and high-level executives from FCCA Member Lines, with the recipe main ingredient of one-on-one meetings through over 940 preset 15-minute sessions scheduled between attendees and cruise executives – a 34 percent increase over the previous record of 700 meetings set last year.



How to further enhance benefits for the destinations – and entire regions – was front and center at the ‘President/CEO & Ministers Roundtable’ featuring high-ranking government officials and a cruise executive panel that included Christopher Ivy, CEO, Margaritaville at Sea; Richard Sasso, Chairman, MSC Cruises USA; Harry Sommer, President & CEO, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd.; John Padgett, President, Princess Cruises; and Michael Bayley, President & CEO, Royal Caribbean International. The meeting focused on mutual benefits, such as purchasing and sourcing opportunities, in addition to overall cruise tourism topics that were open to input by the government officials.

Those executives participated in numerous other functions during the event, including the event’s first ‘Presidents Dinner’ – where they and other high-level executives hosted tables for dinner with a side of networking and business development with destination stakeholders – and the event’s keynote workshop, the ‘Presidential Panel,” where they covered everything from current opportunities – including more homeporting, longer stays, increased capacity, summer cruising, multi-port calls, and local employment and sourcing – to long-term goals, such as achieving net-zero carbon emissions, focusing on partnership and planning for a brighter future.

Sasso also delivered the opening ceremony’s ‘State of the Industry Address’ – where he detailed cruising’s growing demand; the importance of partnerships and roles that associations like FCCA play in developing and sustaining those partnerships; and St. Maarten’s symbiotic relationship





with the cruise industry and prominent role in cruise tourism.

“It is exciting to celebrate the 30th anniversary of this event, and I believe I have been to most of them during my nearly 50 years of partnership as an FCCA Member Line Executive,” said Sasso. “While witnessing many changes to the industry throughout the years, one constant is the importance of communication and understanding, and FCCA continues to remain at the forefront of offering opportunities for this vital mutual exchange.”

The entire audience of stakeholders and executives was invited to the event’s schedule of educational workshops, with many fully booked weeks before the event as the excitement grew to maximize the opportunities of the robust and interactive schedule.

‘The Total Guest Experience’ showed how enhancing the destination experience can drive an increase in spending – exploring how destinations and partners can upgrade their products and adapt to the evolving dynamics of cruise travel. Moderated by Adam Ceserano, President, FCCA, the panel included Marie McKenzie, Sr. Vice President, Government & Destination Affairs, Carnival Corporation & plc.; Albino Di Lorenzo, Sr. Vice President, Port Operations & Government, MSC Cruises USA; Dan Farkas, General Counsel & Chief Development Officer, Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd.; Melissa Morales, Sr. Director, Destination Development, Royal Caribbean Group; Juan Trescastro, Vice President, Global Destinations, Virgin Voyages; and Kenneth Bryan, Minister of Tourism & Ports, Cayman Islands.

‘Creation of a Successful Tour Product’ discussed what it takes to build a successful tour product that meets current industry demands, diving into the strategies needed to cater to both new and seasoned cruisers, from popular tourism products to more exclusive boutique experiences. Moderated by Lee Kayley, Regional Shore Excursions Manager, Virgin Voyages & FCCA Shore Excursion Committee Chairman, the panel included Sandra Neffgen, Director, Shore Excursions, AIDA Cruises; Priscilla Molina, Director, Product Development, Shore Excursions, Carnival Cruise Line; Hein Erasmus, Sr. Manager, Port Adventures & Destination Experiences, Disney Cruise Line; Melanie Carsjens, Director, Shore Excursion Operations & Product Development, Holland America Line & Seabourn; Melissa De La Cruz, Sr. Manager, Global Tour Operations, Royal Caribbean International; and Kelly Hubbard, Director, Product Development, Windstar Cruises.

The event also featured new specialty panels led by successful stakeholders and partners looking to share their expertise, including ‘Best Practices – Getting the Most from the FCCA Conference’ led by Beth Hatt and Melanie Colpitts of Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence; ‘Finding Your Niche – Destinations and Port Operations’ by Tom Spina, Vice President, Tour Development, Cruiseport Destinations; and ‘The Power of Social Media’ presented by Bevan Springer of Marketplace Excellence.

Additionally, attendees were able to target cruise executives during numerous networking functions, joining them in more casual environments to develop business and relationships, while also showcasing some of St. Maarten’s unforgettable culture and history. The destination

and its people went full steam ahead to display its products and cruise tourism potential to the prestigious audience, including exclusive tours, site visits, and meetings with cruise executives.

“The Port and cruise industry have long had a symbiotic relationship, and this event shines light on that partnership and showcases our many new innovations and products created to align with cruise passengers’ constantly changing wants and needs,” said Alexander Gumbs, CEO of Port St. Maarten. “Of course, hosting the Conference also offers us the opportunity to wow cruise executives like we do passengers in order to attract more visits.”

“We are proud to host this event and show our commitment to increasing the benefits from cruise tourism to our people,” said Minister of Tourism Grisha Heyliger-Marten. “The release of BREA’s economic study was fitting as a further reason we took this leap of faith and are confident it will reap rewards for the foreseeable future.”

PHOTO CAPTION 1: On stage at the 30th annual FCCA Cruise Conference and Trade Show in St. Maarten, industry leaders and delegates celebrate St. Maarten’s 60th year as a port destination. From left to right: Michele Paige, CEO of the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association; Alexander Gumbs, CEO of Port St. Maarten Group, who received an honorary award recognizing St. Maarten for hosting this year’s conference and honoring 60 years as a port; Rick Sasso, Chairman of MSC Cruises USA; and seated, Dr. Luc F. E. Mercelina, Prime Minister of St. Maarten and Minister of General Affairs.

PHOTO CAPTION 2: Front-row smiles and industry unity at the opening ceremony of the 30th annual FCCA Cruise Conference and Trade Show in St. Maarten! A packed house filled with energy as key executives from leading cruise lines gathered to represent their companies and engage with industry partners. From left to right: Christopher Ivy, CEO of Margaritaville at Sea; Harry Sommer, President & CEO of Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd.; Michael Bayley, President & CEO of Royal Caribbean International; Marie McKenzie, Sr. Vice President, Government & Destination Affairs at Carnival Corporation & plc.; and John Padgett, President of Princess Cruises.

PHOTO CAPTION 3: Richard Sasso, Chairman of MSC Cruises USA, delivers the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the 30th annual FCCA Cruise Conference, sharing insights and inspiration with industry leaders and attendees gathered in St. Maarten.

PHOTO CAPTION 4: FCCA “Total Guest Experience” workshop speakers discuss enhancing destinations to boost guest satisfaction and spending. From left to right: Albino Di Lorenzo (MSC Cruises USA), Adam Ceserano (FCCA), Melissa Morales (Royal Caribbean Group), Hon. Kenneth Bryan (Cayman Islands Ministry of Tourism and Ports), Marie McKenzie (Carnival Corporation & plc), Juan Trescastro (Virgin Voyages), Juan Kuryla (Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings Ltd)

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