

FCCA 31st Annual Cruise Conference Concludes in Puerto Rico with Calls for Collaboration, Innovation & Sustainable Growth

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, October 31, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 31st Annual Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Cruise Conference & Trade Show concluded in San Juan, Puerto Rico last week, following a week of high-level discussions, productive one-on-one meetings, and renewed commitment to advancing the cruise industry through collaboration, innovation and sustainable development. Hosted in partnership with the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, the event attracted senior cruise executives, government ministers and directors of tourism, and tourism stakeholders — including FCCA Presidential Partners and Platinum Members from across the Caribbean, Latin America and further afield.



A packed house at the Puerto Rico Convention Center as the opening got underway last week.

At the opening, FCCA Chief Executive Officer Michele Paige reaffirmed the Association's core mission of partnership and collaboration. Reflecting on the vision of FCCA Chairman Micky Arison, she reminded delegates that destinations can only fully benefit from the economic potential of the cruise industry when they understand it. "That began the foundation of why we get together — to communicate, collaborate (and) be partners," Paige said. Emphasizing unity, she added that more than 100 cruise executives had assembled for the conference to engage directly with destination stakeholders, answer questions, and help them reach their goals: "We are your partners; we want everyone here to succeed."

Puerto Rico Tourism Company Executive Director Willianette Robles welcomed delegates to San Juan, "the cruise capital of the Eastern Caribbean," highlighting a historic milestone as the island expects to receive a record 1.9 million cruise passengers this season. She noted that Puerto Rico

is “not just welcoming ships — we are building the future of Caribbean cruising” through major investments in infrastructure, technology and workforce development.

Governor Jenniffer González-Colón reaffirmed Puerto Rico’s leadership in Caribbean cruising and its commitment to modernizing port infrastructure across the island. In addition to record passenger arrivals, she highlighted terminal upgrades, and plans to expand cruise activity beyond San Juan — ensuring tourism’s benefits reach other regions on the island.

“What this conference highlighted for us all is that the cruise industry is constantly moving forward. It grows through ongoing dialogue, shared ideas, and a deep understanding of what guests truly value. To host that conversation here in Puerto Rico — to see it unfold in our meeting halls, in the exchange of ideas that flowed all week, and even within La Fortaleza — was genuinely rewarding. It underscored that staying competitive means staying connected and that hospitality, vision and readiness are essential for continued growth. Puerto Rico embraced that challenge this week, and we look forward to welcoming the industry back next year (October 12-16, 2026)!” stated Governor González-Colón.



Willianette Robles, Executive Director of the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (left), was honored by FCCA CEO Michele Paige and Carnival Corporation & plc President & CEO Josh Weinstein for her exceptional leadership and partnership with the cruise industry.



Governor Jenniffer González-Colón speaking at the opening ceremony

Delivering the state of the industry address, Josh Weinstein, President and CEO of Carnival Corporation & plc, shared an impressive outlook for the industry, stating, “Nowhere is the appetite for cruise travel and the outlook for growth greater than in the Caribbean and Latin America.” He noted that global cruise demand is booming — with 37.7 million passengers projected this year, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by “a whopping” 27% — and confirmed that the Caribbean and Latin America remain the world’s leading cruise market. “No other region

offers such welcoming, diverse, close-to-home, and high value itineraries,” he said. Weinstein emphasized that together, cruise lines and destinations are driving real impact — fueling local economies, supporting communities and small businesses, and creating jobs across the region.

The event featured a series of high-impact sessions beginning with the Cruise Industry Masterclass led by Ambra Attus, Director of Impact, Growth & Development of the Aquila Center for Cruise Excellence, who urged delegates to explore the trends transforming global cruising, from evolving guest expectations to sustainability, technology and inclusivity. Attus underscored how the post-pandemic rebound has brought with it a new kind of traveler — one seeking connection, personalization and purpose. “Guests are back but they have a higher expectation, they have deeper values, they have different expectations, and that brings a little bit of pressure on us — on our operations, on our destinations because we really have to ramp up and update as the trends change,” she stated.



The signature FCCA one-on-one meetings featured over 1,000 vital appointments scheduled throughout the week.

The CEO Spotlight and Presidential Panels brought together the leaders of the world’s top cruise brands, including Weinstein of Carnival Corporation & plc, Michael Bayley, President & CEO of Royal Caribbean, Christine Duffy, President of Carnival Cruise Line, Gus Antorcha, President of Princess Cruises, Chris Ivy, CEO of Margaritaville at Sea, and Joe Schott, President of Disney Signature Experiences.

The discussion explored new ship classes, destination development, and the evolving relationship between cruise lines and Caribbean partners. Executives emphasized the importance of collaboration, infrastructure investment, and positioning destinations as strong brands, with exclusive destinations serving as models of community integration and innovation.

They also highlighted the appeal of premium, destination-rich itineraries shaped through partnerships, and the growing value of authentic, immersive local experiences. Panelists urged regional governments to avoid excessive taxes and unexpected fees that could impact deployment decisions, stressing the need for transparent, long-term partnerships to drive shared growth. Renewed calls were made for a coordinated regional approach to employing Caribbean seafarers, acknowledging the challenges but highlighting success stories emerging through the Caribbean Maritime University.

Workshops throughout the week explored diverse themes — from compassionate crisis management and homeporting to destination resilience and digital communications. The Care Team Training, led by Carnival and Royal Caribbean specialists, focused on strengthening crisis response and emotional support across the cruise and hospitality sectors.

In "The Rise of Homeporting for the Caribbean," industry experts from Port St. Maarten, Port Everglades, Maryland Port Administration, Carnival and Royal Caribbean discussed the growing momentum behind homeporting — from infrastructure expansion to new strategic partnerships driving regional cruise growth.

During "Charting a New Course: AI Solutions for Cruise & Tour Professionals," Eric Benedict, Vice President of Training & Development at Access Cruise Inc., delivered an inspiring presentation on how AI is reshaping the cruise industry — from streamlined operations to smarter guest personalization. Through real-world examples, he showed how technology can empower teams, enhance service delivery, and reimagine destination experiences — all while keeping the vital human touch at the heart of hospitality.

Beverly Nicholson-Doty, CEO of Figment Design, delivered a powerful session on "Purpose-Driven Resilience," exploring how small destinations can build sustainable, people-centered, and crisis-ready tourism strategies. Drawing on real-world examples from her experience working across the Caribbean, she emphasized that true resilience is not a reaction — it's embedded in every aspect of strategy, relationships and community engagement. "Resilience doesn't just happen — it's part of your strategy," she reminded attendees, urging destinations to plan ahead, empower their people, and make every visitor experience memorable.

The final session, "Going Beyond Social Media," led by Bevan Springer, President and CEO of Marketplace Excellence, offered a masterclass in integrated communications. He and his team unpacked how to build communications plans that combine PR, social media and digital marketing — with clear goals, aligned messaging, and research-backed evaluation. Attendees learned how to drive real business results through smarter storytelling.

As the conference closed, one message prevailed — that the strength of the Caribbean cruise industry lies in partnership, purpose and people.

Ambra Attus of Aquila summed it up best: "When one of us thrives, the whole industry thrives."

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