

# Caribbean Destinations Risk Missing Cruise Revenue by Prioritizing Fees Over Experiences, Says Port St. Maarten CEO

MIRAMAR, FL, UNITED STATES, February 23, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Caribbean ports and tourism authorities may be overlooking significant economic opportunities by focusing too heavily on increasing cruise head taxes and fees instead of strategies that boost visitor spending, according to Port St. Maarten Group CEO Alexander Gumbs.



Alexander Gumbs

In the debut episode of the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association's (FCCA) Leadership Series, released this month, Gumbs shared candid insights with FCCA President Adam Ceserano, describing the current emphasis on taxation as often being approached without fully accounting for the broader economic contribution of cruise passengers.

"I think at times the item or the topic is looked at with blinders on ... not looking at a wider impact of the industry," Gumbs said.

Citing St. Maarten data, he noted that cruise visitors, who typically spend about five hours on island, average USD \$163 per person. When adjusted for time, he explained, cruise passengers generate a higher per-hour spend than stayover visitors. "The average per hour spent from a cruise standpoint is higher," he said.

Rather than concentrating primarily on fee increases, Gumbs advocated investing in compelling, high-value experiences that naturally encourage greater on-island spending. "I think we need to start focusing on where the dollars are being spent and how they are spread across the destination," he said. Without showcasing "the full depth of the experiences or the unique opportunities" available, destinations risk "leaving the dollars on the table."

His remarks come as several Caribbean destinations debate higher passenger fees to support

infrastructure and public services, while industry stakeholders call for a balanced approach that sustains cruise growth and maximizes local economic impact. Gumbs emphasized that differentiated attractions, improved infrastructure and year-round appeal could deliver stronger, more sustainable returns.

Elsewhere in the conversation, Gumbs reflected on his journey from a childhood fascination with tourists in St. Maarten to leading the port's recovery following Hurricane Irma in 2017. "In chaos at times comes opportunities," he recalled, crediting the storm with accelerating innovation and resilience.

Looking ahead, he underscored the importance of distinct island identities and regional collaboration. "The Caribbean is not a pool of destinations that are all the same," Gumbs said, adding that the region's future remains "bright" with the right focus.

For young professionals entering tourism, his advice was direct: "Start early ... get out there, show yourself, show up, be present," while remaining mindful of personal branding and online reputation.

The full FCCA Leadership Series interview, recorded at FCCA headquarters in Miramar, Florida, is available on YouTube and FCCA social channels, offering perspectives for ports, cruise lines and tourism officials navigating the sector's evolving landscape.

Watch the debut episode at <https://youtu.be/FcONS-a5RYs>.

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