

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA ACHIEVES SUCCESS AT FLORIDA CARIBBEAN CRUISE ASSOCIATION (FCCA) ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Antigua and Barbuda's Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Authority expect strong cruise passenger growth after successful meetings securing the industry's future.

NEW YORK CITY, NY, UNITED STATES, October 22, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the cruise industry continues its record-breaking growth in the region, Antigua and Barbuda Minister of Tourism, The Hon. Charles 'Max' Fernandez, led a delegation to the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) 32nd Annual Conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico, October 12-16. The conference attracted close to 700 cruise executives, government officials, port operators, tour providers and other stakeholders from the region to explore opportunities to strengthen tourism offerings and expand the benefits of growth for local communities.

The team comprised Colin C. James, Chief Executive Officer of the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority (ABTA), along with other key ABTA and Ministry of Tourism officials directly responsible for the destination's marketing, policy and product development that supports the industry. The delegation held high-level meetings with executives representing twelve cruise lines, as well as executives of the FCCA.

In sharing the country's cruise success, Minister Fernandez said, "The recent investment in our cruise port facilities to accommodate larger ships, the US\$30 million upland investment, our award-winning and distinctive visitor experiences, along with the strong relationships we have



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Photo caption: Antigua & Barbuda delegation with Carnival Corporation Executives (Photo Courtesy, Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority)

cultivated with our cruise line partners, have been bearing fruit, generating greater economic opportunities for the thousands of Antiguan and Barbudans who depend on the cruise industry.

"It is precisely because of this continued growth that we will move forward with a comprehensive cruise tourism capacity study to better understand our destination's carrying capacity, guide future development, safeguard the quality of our visitor experiences, and ensure that the economic benefits of this expanding industry remain sustainable and far-reaching for our people," said the minister.

The meetings were productive and included a presentation outlining new enhancements in the cruise sector, including the imminent availability of liquefied natural gas (LNG) for newer ships. This will be a key differentiator for Antigua and Barbuda as more US-based ships make the country a port of call.

Team Antigua and Barbuda also shared new enhancements that cruise guests can experience this season. These include newly constructed upscale stores offering a myriad of shopping experiences, and a day club complete with a pool and bar, which will be a game changer by giving passengers and crew a novel way to enjoy the cruise port facility. New mobile visitor information kiosks will also provide full access to all passengers, including those who are differently abled, as they disembark into the port of St. John's. These enhancements for the winter 2026/27 season were very well received by cruise line partners.

Norwegian Cruise Line outlined plans for approximately 16 calls during the 2027-2028 season, with at least 28 calls anticipated across NCL, Oceania and Regent Seven Seas Cruises. This marks a huge increase over the current winter season, which will see only 2 calls from the NCL mainline.

MSC Cruises reported that the MSC World Europa, among the third-largest class of vessels in the industry, will be the largest vessel ever to dock in Antigua, with its inaugural call scheduled for December 7, 2026. It will be the first vessel over 200,000 tons to berth in St. John's, carrying more than 6,700 guests. In addition, the MSC Opera will make alternate-Saturday calls to the destination throughout the year through 2029.

Carnival Cruise Line, in response to excellent feedback scores from guests who visit Antigua, confirmed that the destination will receive 14 calls for the winter 2026-2027 season, a marked increase from the 4 calls of the previous winter season.

P&O Cruises, which homeports in Antigua, indicated that Britannia will conduct a one-off turnaround operation in Antigua for the very first time. Additionally, Antigua's homeporting calls will double to a weekly operation as of November 2027, with two vessels, Arvia and her sister ship Iona, alternating each week for the entire season. Royal Caribbean Group has also confirmed 110 planned calls for Antigua across its Royal Caribbean and Celebrity brands for the

2027-2028 season, a significant increase over the current season.

ABTA CEO Colin C. James spoke optimistically about the expected increase in arrivals continuing into 2027. "With global cruise passenger numbers projected to climb from about 37 million in 2025 to 46 million by 2031, Antigua and Barbuda must constantly ensure that we remain well positioned to benefit from the industry's continued expansion. Antigua and Barbuda is expected to see a record-breaking 483 cruise ship calls this year, up from 436 in 2025, which will see some 894,469 cruise guests visiting our shores, with the destination well on target to achieve a record 1 million cruise guest arrivals in 2027," said James.

The key takeaway from Antigua and Barbuda's participation in the FCCA 32nd Annual Conference is that its significant investment in its cruise tourism product has resulted in significant growth in cruise calls across major brands, reflecting the industry's overwhelming confidence in the destination.

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ABOUT ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Antigua (pronounced An-tee'ga) and Barbuda (Bar-byew'da) is located in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. The twin-island paradise offers visitors two uniquely distinct experiences, ideal temperatures year-round, a rich history, vibrant culture, exhilarating excursions, award-winning resorts, mouth-watering cuisine and 365 stunning pink and white-sand beaches - one for every day of the year. The largest of the English-speaking Leeward Islands, Antigua comprises 108-square miles with rich history and spectacular topography that provides a variety of popular sightseeing opportunities. Nelson's Dockyard, the only remaining example of a Georgian fort a listed UNESCO World Heritage site, is perhaps the most renowned landmark. Antigua's tourism events calendar includes the prestigious Antigua Sailing Week, Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, and the annual Antigua Carnival; known as the Caribbean's Greatest Summer Festival. Barbuda, Antigua's smaller sister island, is the ultimate celebrity hideaway. The island lies 27 miles north-east of Antigua and is just a 15-minute plane ride away. Barbuda is known for its untouched 11-mile stretch of pink sand beach and as the home of the largest Frigate Bird Sanctuary in the Western Hemisphere. Find information on Antigua & Barbuda at: www.visitantiguabarbuda.com or follow us on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/antiguabarbuda> Facebook: www.facebook.com/antiguabarbuda; Instagram: www.instagram.com/AntiguaandBarbuda.

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