



PRESS RELEASE

St. Maarten, 05.01.2016

Port St. Maarten caters to over 1.9 million Cruise Passengers in 2015. Voted #1 Cruise Port in the Caribbean

January 05, 2016 – Port St. Maarten accommodated 1,901,617 cruise passengers in 2015, approximately five per cent less than in 2014 when for the first time the destination hit the two million mark (2,001,996, vessel calls 692). Cruise vessels in 2015 made 683 port calls.

Port St. Maarten has come in as the #1 cruise port in the Caribbean, the second year in a row by Cruise Fever.net readers who were asked to vote on the best cruise ports in the Caribbean in the 2015 Cruise Fever Fan Awards.

The other nine cruise destinations vying for the number one position were St. Thomas, Cozumel (Mexico), Grand Cayman (Cayman Islands), Grand Turk (Turks & Caicos Islands), San Juan (Puerto Rico), St. Kitts, Oranjestad (Aruba), Ocho Rios (Jamaica), and Roatan (Honduras).

Cruise Fever has been featured in many media outlets including the Drudge Report, CNN, Huffington Post, ABC News, Yahoo, MSN, and ABC Radio. The website receives over 200,000 unique visits a month, with some months reaching over half a million unique readers. Cruise Fever was founded in the Spring of 2011 and is based in Cincinnati, Ohio.

According to Port St. Maarten Management, the five per cent less in passengers in 2015 is a result of a combination of factors such as hurricane season cancellations due to the approach of weather systems to the island resulting in cruise vessels having to cancel their visits; opening of an expanded cruise port in Tortola; and redeployment of vessels to the Asian market.

Port St. Maarten however remains number one in the Caribbean. Very important developments for the country's cruise industry in 2016 is cooperation with Princess Juliana International Airport (SXM Airport), and the establishment of the Sint Maarten Tourism Authority (STA) which is essential in destination marketing and product development.

The cruise industry is the most exciting and fast-growing categories of the tourism travel market which has seen average passenger growth of 7.2 per cent per year since 1990.

Cruising is important for the sampling of destinations whereby travelers return as stay-over. Over 80 per cent of cruise passengers think it's a good way to sample a destination, and 40 per cent of cruisers in a survey have stated they had returned as a stayover guests after first visiting a destination during a cruise. Port St. Maarten therefore finds it very important with respect to developing a strategic relationship with SXM Airport and the yet to be established STA in order to capitalize on these and other opportunities.

For the period, 1980-2009, over 176 million travelers have taken cruises of two-days or longer, and of that number, 70 per cent have been generated for the last 10-years, and 40 per cent of the total passengers' numbers have been generated for the last five years alone.

Port St. Maarten remains very confident with respect to the future development of the cruise sector, but is also monitoring developments in Cuba and continued deployments – repositioning cruises - to Asia which will increase in 2016 whereby the major lines relocate ships changing the vessel’s Summer-Winter regions of operation.

Carnival Cruise Lines in 2015 received permission from the United States Government to operate limited cruises into Cuba starting some time in 2016.

Permission was granted to the cruise line under pre-existing laws that allow Americans to travel to Cuba for humanitarian and cultural exchanges. Carnival has designed a package under the brand ‘Fathom,’ which will take passengers to countries to carry out volunteer work, also known as ‘social impact cruises.’

Social impact cruises have been designed to cater to cruise consumers who are more interested in making a social impact on a destination, and this market, ‘social impact travel,’ is worth approximately US\$1.6 billion. The Dominican Republic is included in the Fathom brand itinerary and Carnival is forecast to send around 35,000 passengers to that country.

Cruise lines are repositioning to Asia where they see significant growth opportunities as the market continues to develop and mature. There is the potential for double-digit growth in the Asian market in the next 10-years. China is expected to become the world’s second largest cruise market by 2017, and eventually will become the largest cruise market in the entire world.

Cruise lines are also looking possible joint ventures, including port development and the potential to launch a domestic Chinese cruise brand in the rapidly growing China vacation market, and this is part of the aforementioned expanding their capacity in Asia.

Key markets that are showing growth in Asia are China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Korea.

Port St. Maarten Management concluded that every effort is being made to keep the cruise destination in the number one position, but that this cannot be done alone by the Port St. Maarten Group of Companies, but must also include various stakeholders to ensure long-term sustainable tourism development for the country and the its people.



PHOTO OUTLINE: Port St. Maarten.

For further questions, please contact: comments@portofstmaarten.com