

PRESS RELEASE

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Port St. Maarten hits historical two millionth cruise passenger mark on new year's eve

POINT BLANCHE, (January 1, 2015) – Port St. Maarten on New Year's Eve, Wednesday, December 31st, 2014, welcomed the historical two millionth cruise passenger in 50-years of cruising. The country at the end of 2014 received for the entire year approximately 2,000,864 cruise passengers.

Family John and Marleen Tharpe along with their three granddaughters, passengers onboard the Oasis of the Seas, were selected by Minister of Tourism, Economic Affairs, Transport & Telecommunications Hon. Claret Connor on Wednesday, December 31st, 2014 at the Dr. A. C. Wathey Cruise & Cargo Facility to mark this momentous occasion.

The Tharpe family who have visited St. Maarten twice before, were presented with a commemorative plaque by Minister Connor and will receive a free cruise for two as part of this historical achievement in the cruise history of the country. This was the first cruise visit for the three granddaughters of the Tharpe family who hail from Columbus, Georgia.

Seven ships were in port on New Year's Eve, namely, Albatros (536 cruise passengers approximately), Celebrity Reflection (3,046), Oasis of the Seas (5,400), Prinsendam (790), Seven Seas Navigator (490), Thomson Celebration (1,254) and Ventura (3,100), for a total of 14,616 cruise passengers. The exact figures will be available next week and the aforementioned figures are based on double occupancy.

During a champagne toast between the Minister, Supervisory Board representatives and Port management, Renald Williams, a member of the Supervisory Board of Directors, welcomed everyone present, and added that none of this would have been possible without the input and hard work of all concerned.

Williams pointed out that there are challenges ahead especially with the opening up of Cuba and its proximity to the United States. Williams said that the main priority in the New Year should be to keep the cruise passengers happy so that they will continue to want to visit St. Maarten.

The Supervisory Board member concluded by thanking everybody for a job well done and wished those present a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year 2015, before presenting Minister Hon. Claret Connor with a commemorative plaque to mark the occasion.

Minister Connor during the ceremony stated that reaching the two millionth cruise passenger represented growth, "What you do every single day is very important for the country and the development of its people." The Minister added that he felt proud of this great achievement and congratulated port board, management, staff, stakeholders and all those working in the tourism sector for a job well done on behalf of the Council of Ministers and the people of St. Maarten.

Minister Connor concluded that St. Maarten is a trendsetter and would have to look for innovative and enhanced tours in order to remain at the top; adding that everybody who have contributed to this momentous moment would have to continue to give it 110 per cent to continue facilitating the growth of the country's economy.



Minister Connor also said he looked forward in a few years' time to marking the 2.5 million mark in cruise passengers.

Port St. Maarten has made considerable investments into infrastructure related to cruise development during the past three years with the most recent being the Down Street Cruise Heritage Development Project. This development still under construction is just one of several change community projects that will further enhance the country's tourism product.

The approximately US\$2 million project which is located next to the Walter Plantz Tender Jetty, entails the construction of a square with six cabanas to be used for a bar/restaurant, the selling of arts and crafts and other tourist related goods; toilet/bathroom facilities; lockers; the square will be disabled accessible; parking for five taxi's; parking on the beachside and around the area which is being discussed based on several proposals; small splash pool for kids; and one of the main features will be a water fountain illuminating 30 different lights at night. The new square will also have 24-hour security.

The marketing efforts by Port management have paid off in reaching this milestone in 2014 which also represented 50-years of St. Maarten being a cruise destination. Investing in hosting the 21st Annual Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Cruise Conference and Trade Show was also well worthwhile since the conference became the most successful and largest ever held in the 21-year history of the event.

Cruise tourism contributions to St. Maarten as a destination is very prominent and represents one third of the country's gross domestic product. In 2013 the destination received over 1.7 million cruise passengers.

According to the Business Research & Economic Advisors (BREA) 2012 study, *Economic Contribution of Cruise Tourism to the Destination Economies*, the average expenditure per passenger in St. Maarten was \$185.40, which benefitted numerous industries through purchases of goods that included food and beverage at restaurants and bars, clothing, shore excursions, ground transportation, local crafts and souvenirs, watches and jewelry, perfumes and cosmetics, electronics, entertainment/clubs/casinos, retail purchases of liquor, and telephone and internet.

The same study showed that the average expenditure per crew in St. Maarten was \$135.50 on similar products and services. Plus it revealed the direct and indirect employment generated by the cruise industry, totaling 8,123 jobs and \$159.8 million in employee wages.



PHOTO CUTLINE: Foreground, L to R: Port St. Maarten Government Relations Hector Peters, Marleen Tharpe (holding the commemorative plaque), husband John Tharpe, and their three grand-daughters, Minister Hon. Claret Connor standing behind the three young ladies, Port St. Maarten Supervisory Board Director Renald Williams (right) along with other representatives from Port St. Maarten and the Ministers Cabinet.

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