



A Perfect Caribbean Gateway

Port of St. Maarten adds amenities to boost tourism product

The island on which it sits is a world-recognized cruise destination. But incoming and outgoing cruise ships are not the only thing keeping people busy at the Port of St. Maarten.

The port's management went from public to private in 1989, and, following the devastation caused by hurricanes Luis and Marilyn in 1995, the urgency to rebuild was renewed in the form of the Modified SMPA 1996 Layout, which eventually resulted in construction of the modern facility.

Another development item has been the creation of Harbour Point Village, a complex consisting of 12 shops and 12 market stalls that's intended for cruise visitors who chose not to leave the boat on an organized tour, or for those who did leave the vessel but had no opportunity to purchase souvenirs.

The basic village concept was to duplicate old buildings and enhance the nostalgic feel of the capital city of Philipsburg, which was of particular importance to differentiate the village from the island's other high-quality shopping centers.

No fewer than eight cruise ships arrived to the port on a single day last December, making it the single biggest day of the season and the only day on which more than 22,000 passengers would be in the port at one time. Greeting the arriving passengers was a laundry list of activities that included a live broadcast by a local radio station, holiday caroling and live music and dancing.

The Carnival Dream ship arrived with 3,652 cruise passengers, the Celebrity Reflection brought another 3,030 and was followed by the Crystal Serenity

(1,096), the Norwegian Gem (2,466), the Norwegian Sun (2,250), the Oasis of the Seas (5,400), the Ventura (3,100) and the Westerdam (1,848).

The previous record gathering at the port was in 2005, when nine ships and 18,000 passengers arrived.

"Cruise tourism is what makes our country tick," said Mark Mingo, CEO of the St. Maarten Harbour Group of Companies. "It is a very important segment of our economy and we have to do everything to protect it and safeguard our visitors in order for them and the cruise lines to continue to visit our destination."

Going forward, the island's top leaders have even more in mind.

An introductory guide for foreign investors – the St. Maarten Investors' Guide 20/20 – aims to indicate what the country has to offer investors and illustrate the directions in which it is heading. A DVD was presented as a preview of what the guide will include.

The scheduled expansion of the Panama Canal is seen as a watershed moment for the island, which, according to the guide, will enable St. Maarten to expand its port operations – air and sea – to provide sub-hub transportation services between Latin America and Europe.

Other aims include the attraction of boat yard, maintenance and repair interests, along with other service providers, to enhance the stay of the island's visiting yacht operators.

Small renewable energy manufacturers are also sought, as are small and medium-sized marketing, advertising and promotional companies to promote and distribute European and Latin American products

and services from St. Maarten to the rest of the Caribbean and beyond.

"When you work together you are able to achieve a lot," said Ted Richardson, minister of tourism and economic affairs, transport and telecommunication. "This is a beginning. This project has to trigger interest abroad. It shows that St. Maarten is a great country to do business with."

In the late 1950s, Dr. A.C. Wathey was among the first to recognize that tourism could be a transcendent industry on the tiny island – comprised of just 37 square miles – in the northeastern Caribbean. And Wathey, who died in 1998, was considered the "Father of Modern Day St. Maarten" for his efforts.

Since his pronouncements decades ago, the constant and unprecedented growth of the industry has resulted in tourism being the foundation for the island's economy. The island's first deep-water pier at Great Bay was labeled the Dr. A.C. Wathey Cruise Pier when it opened in 1964, and he continued to call for newer, larger and better harbor facilities to match the burgeoning potential his native land possessed.

In 1980, 105,000 cruise passengers visited the island. Nine years later that annual number had jumped more than six times, and, by the end of 2002, the figure reached 1 million.

But while Wathey did not live to see his urgings for drastic facility upgrades become reality, his name now adorns the entire complex – which is named the Dr. A.C. Wathey Cruise & Cargo Facilities. The sprawling harbor is also home to a similarly named cruise pier, the Dr. A.C. Wathey Cruise Pier, along with the John

Craane Cruise Terminal and the Captain David Cargo Quay.

The cargo quay has a length of 540 meters, docking capacity for three general lift-on lift-off and two roll-on roll-off vessels at a water depth of 35 feet. The facility is serviced by two 100-ton Gottwald shore cranes and includes a container storage area of over 3,000 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units).

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Cargo vessels can also be provided with fuel and water services.

And while its roots stretch back all those years, the complex illustrates its modern focus as one of the first worldwide ports to utilize green energy in the form of six wind turbines, utilization of solar power in segments, electric golf carts and a dedicated investment in the last two years on a retrofitting project that will bring buildings up to LEED-certification standards.



Strategically based in the Caribbean island of St. Maarten was founded on June 23 1985 by Mr. George H W Pelgrim with the sole aim to provide high quality Port Terminal Handling, Stevedoring, Trucking and other related Cargo and Maritime services to all Cargo Lines serving the Port of Philipsburg, St. Maarten .

Our mission statement is to provide our principals with efficient and cost effective professional Port Terminal and Trucking services utilizing our over 25 years of experience.

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Its operators, St. Maarten Harbour Group of Companies, invest not only in the port itself, but also its surrounding community – a commitment evidenced by a \$50 million project to build a causeway bridge over an adjacent lagoon to alleviate traffic issues, and additional monies earmarked for upgrade of the surrounding area's main street.

The *Curacao Chronicle* reported that the port welcomed nearly 1.8 million cruise passengers in 2013 – a record for the complex and a 2 percent rise from 2012. Its ship calls also rose from 622 to 631, and the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association claimed the total cruise tourism expenditures in St. Maarten for 2011-12 were \$356.2 million, placing it second among the region's 21 participant destinations.

Only the Bahamas (\$393.8 million) surpassed St. Maarten's total, while the top five was rounded out by the United States Virgin Islands (\$339.8 million), Puerto Rico (\$186.6 million) and the Cayman Islands (\$157.7 million).



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