

Port Victoria gears up to welcome back cruise ships | 17 March 2021



Port Victoria is gearing up to welcome back cruise ships in August this year

Subject to government approval, Port Victoria will in August this year see the docking of a first cruise ship after a moratorium imposed by cabinet on this activity in our waters as a result of the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

It was the Minister for Tourism & Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Sylvestre Radegonde, who made the statement after chairing a meeting on the resumption of cruise ship activities in the country now that the country's borders will open up to visitors on March 25, 2021.

Crystal Esprit, which has planned to venture in the waters of Port Victoria and of the outer islands as from August 2021, with fewer than one hundred passengers, will be among six other cruise ships that have shown an early interest in carrying out cruising activities in our archipelago up to early February 2022.

Stakeholders involved with the country's cruise ship activities, yesterday met at the Seychelles Tourism Board (STB) conference room, Botanical House, Mont Fleuri to discuss and give their inputs on the resumption of this activity.

Apart from senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism and from the Seychelles Tourism Board (STB), the meeting yesterday was also attended by representatives from the private sector such as tour operators, shipping agents, destination management companies (DMCs) and concerned agencies such as the department of environment, the Seychelles Ports Authority (SPA), the Seychelles Maritime Safety Administration (SMSA), the Islands Development Company (IDC) and the health department whose representatives, led by Dr Jude Gedeon, followed the meeting virtually.

Noting he was very satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, Minister Radegonde said one of the key measures agreed upon is that only small cruise ships with a maximum capacity of 300 passengers will for the time being be allowed to dock in Port Victoria.

Among other decisions taken, all passengers and crew members must be vaccinated prior to boarding the ship and further will go through the online electronic health travel authorisation system (Travizory).

Minister Radegonde claimed that from a health point of view guided by the health authority, our country is at the moment in a better position to control the spread of Covid-19 on smaller passenger capacity cruise vessels rather than on large vessels with one thousand plus passengers.

It also came out of the meeting that the concerned stakeholders are well versed with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with regard to the pandemic which through them (stakeholders) it will be related to their clients as standard guided rules to be observed while in the country.

A special passage way is to be built on the north side of Port Victoria

to facilitate easy access in and out of the quay for the passengers and crew without them disturbing or be disturbed by ongoing commercial activities.

Only one cruise ship will be allowed to dock at the quay at any one time and in case of another, she will be docked out at sea and her passengers will be transferred to and from the quay by small ferries.

With regard to cruise ship passengers visiting outer islands, only small cruise ships will be granted permission to make visits. Under strict guidelines, only a limited number of visitors will be allowed to disembark on certain designated islands so as not to disturb the environment and the tranquility being enjoyed by the islands' high paying premium clients.

It is to be noted that due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic which started in March 2020, the Seychelles government took the decision to halt all cruise ship activities in Port Victoria for a year as there were surges in the number of cases of infections on many cruise ships worldwide. The cruise ship season was supposed to go until May 4, 2020 before resuming again from October the same year.

The cruise ship season had already started in the country as of October 2019 to March 10, 2020, before it was halted. During that short spell a total of thirty-nine ships had called at Port Victoria out of the fifty-three port calls that were already planned till the end of May 4, 2020.

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