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Tourism Takes VI Marketing To New Heights With Strong Labor Day Weekend Presence In New York City

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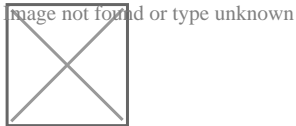
From left: Musician Mic Love, co-host of Good Day New York Lori Stokes and the Department of Tourism's Director of Communications Alani Henneman-Todman. By. USVI Dept. of Tourism

NEW YORK CITY -- From the countless Americans who watched Fox's "Good Day New York" show where Mic Love -- one of the USVI's top Soca artists -- performed "VI to the Bone", the territory's new anthem, or Dept. of Tourism Communications Director Alani Henneman Todman's exceptional promotion of the islands on the same show, to a VI Ambassadors event at the Intercontinental Hotel in Manhattan in a packed, lively room, D.O.T., under the leadership of Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, is working to rebrand the territory to focus on its culture and people -- and what better place to leave an impression and entice potential visitors along with the

Diaspora to come to the Virgin Islands than New York City for the Labor Day Weekend.

D.O.T. capped off its weekend events with a presence at the Caribbean Cultural Festival on Sunday, where it promoted the territory's upcoming festivals and carnival and reminded the thousands in attendance that the U.S. Virgin Islands is open for business.

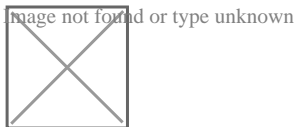
Preceding the Sunday Sept. 1 affair was a Sat. Aug. 31 morning showing at Helen Mills Event Space and Theater of Virgin Islands author and filmmaker Peter Bailey's "Paradise Discovered: The Unbreakable Virgin Islanders." The film is based on surviving Hurricanes Irma and Maria on his native St. Thomas. The screening was the 16th stop on Mr. Bailey's nationwide tour that began on St. Thomas approximately a year ago.



VI Ambassadors event in New York City (VI Consortium)

At the Ambassadors event on the night of Friday Aug. 30, Virgin Islanders of all ages packed a room that accommodates about 150 people. They represented diaspora from St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John and also the BVI, who danced, sampled hors d'oeuvres, drank and mingled. They were serenaded by a variety of VI artists: Mic Love, Adam O., Nikki Smith and the Spectrum Band.

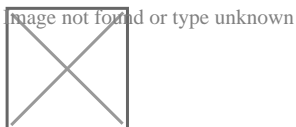
DJ and local hero, Kashief D. Hamilton, known as General Kuntry, was also part of Friday night's lineup. Mr. Hamilton was recently thrust into the spotlight for his heroic efforts after saving a disabled Carnival Fascination passenger from drowning at The West Indian Company (WICO) dock in August.



Adam O. performs during a VI Ambassadors event in New York City on Friday, Aug. 30 (VI Consortium)

Avery Lewis, the administrator for St. Thomas and St. John, represented Governor Albert Bryan. "I'd like you all to spread the word that the Virgin Islands is open for business," he said. "... We are happy people and we are caring people. One thing we have in the Virgin Islands is love."

Mrs. Henneman-Todman throughout the event spoke of a new direction at D.O.T. that not only has the territory's culture and people at the forefront, but one that also invites Virgin Islanders with ideas on improving the tourism product to share those ideas with the department.



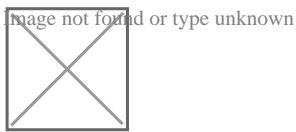
USVI Dept. of Tourism representatives await guests of the VI Ambassadors event in New York City (VI Consortium)

The weekend events have many benefits for the U.S. Virgin Islands as it relates to exposure. But among the primary goals behind the strong Labor Day presence is the promotion of the territory's festivals and carnivals, whose execution is now a function of the Department of Tourism as part of

a newly created arm called the Division of Festivals. No longer will the territory's carnival and festival products be helmed by private carnival committees, whose leaders on many occasions clashed with senators after the committee heads failed, on numerous occasions, to produce proper documentation on how millions of taxpayer dollars provided to the committees over the years were spent.

With the new responsibility at D.O.T., Mr. Boschulte has made priority the successful execution of the Crucian Christmas Festival, which runs from December 7, 2019, to January 4, 2020.

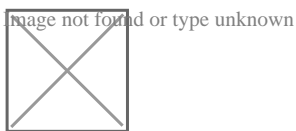
And that's just one part of the broader strategy, the commissioner told the Consortium Saturday. He said the department will continue to spread the word that the USVI's tourism product has made notable strides and continues to grow its capacity to accommodate visitors, with a number of major hotels coming online this year or early 2020. As it relates to Hurricane Dorian, Mr. Boschulte said, "We're up and running," with airlines ramping up on trips the day after Dorian to accommodate passengers who were delayed in the territory, while bringing new visitors in.



Bevan Springer, center, of Marketplace Excellence. The firm has been an indelible part of the USVI marketing strategy with its deep pool of contacts and strong ties in NYC and across the United States. Owned by Mr. Springer, the company plays a major role in the territory's now-yearly participation in the National Association of Black Journalists Convention, which over the years has provided the U.S. Virgin Islands with key opportunities to reach tens of millions of potential visitors through a group of influential media personalities and writers. (VI Consortium)

Speaking of new visitors, Mr. Boschulte has been utilizing modern mediums to reach first-time visitors while enticing those who've been to the USVI before with a fresh marketing push: the people, the culture, the history -- the food.

"Our strategy from a tourism perspective continues to be a shift away from traditional marketing and continuing to move more towards our best assets which are our people, our culture, our food," Mr. Boschulte said. He said while tourists will still be able to enjoy the beaches, the department will work towards giving more exposure to other areas of the territory that D.O.T. believes has potential to attract more visitors.



Virgin Islanders having a good time during the VI Ambassadors event in New York City (VI Consortium)

Part of that effort is a reigniting of the VI Ambassadors program, Mr. Boschulte said. "There is no better representative of our offerings here in the territory than our own people who have been around the world. So what we're trying to do is give them that spark of energy and say to them we value you, we trust you, and we want you to go out and spread that message that there is no better place to vacation than the U.S. Virgin Islands."

The strategy to boost the VI Ambassadors program [started in Atlanta at The Gathering Spot](#), and will extend to other states in the coming months.

The new VI Ambassadors push will tie-in nicely with D.O.T.'s Division of Festivals. Mr. Boschulte said with the upcoming Crucian Christmas Festival, VI Ambassadors are well positioned to spread the word. "We believe the best spark for the festival will be our own people from the Diaspora to get them to say, 'Hey, I haven't been back home in a couple of years, it looks like they're doing some new things with the carnival and festivals, I will book a ticket to come.'"

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