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Yacht Haven Grande Event Brings 72 Yachts to St. Thomas, the Largest in Over Two Decades

Sports / **Published On November 18, 2019 06:58 AM /**

Staff Consortium **November 18, 2019**

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ST. THOMAS — Seventy-four multihulls, monohulls and motor yachts lined the docks at IGY's Yacht Haven Grande on St. Thomas for the USVI Charter Yacht Show, held November 11 to 14, and hosted by the VI Professional Charter Association (VIPCA).

Some 140 brokers from the Caribbean, U.S. and Europe toured the fleet, which ranged from 44- to 141.8-foot in length. This made the 2019 show the largest in well over two decades in terms of the number of yachts showing, brokers in attendance and yacht size combined. What's more is that since VIPCA began operation of the show in 2017, yacht attendance has more than doubled from 36 yachts in 2017, and 55 in 2018. These striking facts shows that the U.S. territory's charter industry is booming. It's a theme played out on several fronts such as the boutique nature of the industry, virgin cruising

grounds both to the east and west as well as around the Charlotte Amalie hub, and the territory's public and private sector investments in assuring the success of the marine tourism industry.

"The charter yacht sector is such an important part of our U.S. Virgin Islands tourism industry and makes such an impact on our economy," says Luana Wheatley, director of the film office for the USVI Department of Tourism, a strong supporter of the USVI Charter Yacht Show.

A Boutique Industry – Something for Everyone

The boutique nature of the USVI's crewed charter industry is its prime selling point. Since every yacht is different and each has developed its own unique niche to compete, standards across the board are high.

For example, expedition-style and a one-of-a-kind experiences is what Seth Salzmann, captain of the largest yacht on show, the 141.8-foot Columbia, says is his vessels niche. Launched in 2014 by the Eastern Shipbuilding Group, the replica of the same-named famous fishing schooner built in Massachusetts in 1923, boasts 21st century amenities and accommodates up to 12 guests.

"We offer a comfortable experience getting from point A to point B, especially at longer distances such as from the Virgin Islands down to St. Maarten, St. Lucia, Barbados or Grenada," says Salzmann, who explains that while this is Columbia's third season in the Caribbean, it's the first time the yacht is available for charter.

Eros, a 1939-built 115-foot staysail schooner that has hosted European royalty in the past and more recently underwent an 18-year-museum quality restoration, offers guests a delightful mix of tall ship and yacht charter experience.

"We cater to everyone from those who want to participate in a full on sailing experience to those who simply want to relax, since we have four crew, and enjoy the classic nature of the vessel," says captain Justin Bernhart. "We also have all the modern day water toys from surf boards to SUPs, inflatable beach and water toys, and a 14-foot tender for wakeboarding."

In addition to monohull sailing yachts, such as Columbia and Eros, there were beautiful power yachts such as Elite, a 2018-built Sunseeker 66, on show.

"Sailing is all about the journey, power is about the destinations," says captain Mike Briggs, who adds that the yacht's gyro stabilizers offer a smooth ride.

Multihulls, in particular catamarans, featured as over three-quarters of show entries. Yet, again, no two are the same.

"Our focus is on watersports," says Kieran Bown, captain of the 2014-built 62-foot Lagoon, Twin Flame, which true to niche was the only vessel with Lift-brand foiling boards aboard as water toys. "We run an expedition company in the off-season and want to bring some of that onboard, such as expedition-style advanced scuba trips and luxury liveaboard dive vacations."

Families, even those with young children, are the focus for Bill and Migdalia Pinkney, who own, operate and enjoy many repeat guests aboard their 40-foot Norseman, Lady Dee.

“We enjoy people, especially children and families, and enjoy sharing our favorite destinations in the USVI, BVI and Puerto Rico,” says captain Bill Pinkney, who is the first black man to solo circumnavigate the globe via the Southern Ocean and Cape Horn.

A 'Must-Do' Show

The USVI Charter Yacht Show offered a full slate of yachts, plus themed nightly parties, culinary and cocktail competitions, educational events and industry meetings, a Marine Expo, State of the Industry address that provided the latest on the cruising grounds, and for the season ahead, and a Day Charter Conference for professionals in the Virgin Islands hospitality accommodation sector, created a one-of-a-kind opportunity for attendees. This is especially true for brokers, the global sales arm of the charter yacht industry.

“Our attendance at this year’s USVI Charter Yacht Show was key for our business with its impressive list of crewed yachts on display along with some fun and informative evening events to attend. This must-see annual show provides us with the opportunity to once again inspect the various yachts on display and see what each one offers, but more importantly, to get to know the crews on a personal basis in order to match them appropriately with our clients,” says Lynne Campbell, owner and charter director of Carefree Yacht Charters, in Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Similarly, Trish Cronan, president of Ocean Getaways, in Ft. Denaud, FL, adds, “The show is invaluable particularly because many new catamarans debut at this show each year. With so many different models of catamarans now available for charter, it is very helpful to have them all in one place to compare their features. Additionally, it is an opportunity to evaluate new crews and experience their service and cuisine. This year’s show was especially interesting with a large selection of motor yachts and monohull sailing yachts.”

New this year, the USVI Charter Yacht Show debuted as a silver level Clean Regatta. VIPCA worked with the Newport, RI-based ocean conservation nonprofit, Sailors for the Sea Powered by Oceana, and with the Virgin Islands-based crew-led Project Green Flag to encourage the charter community to reduce the use of single-use plastics and to make choices that keep the marine environment healthy. Event initiatives included wrist bands made of Quantum Sails’ recycled sail cloth; compostable cups/plates/utensils; and refillable bottle water stations. Additionally, VIPCA donated \$300 to the University of the Virgin Islands to purchase 600 mangrove seedlings to plant in St. Thomas to offset the carbon emissions created by charter brokers flying into the show.

USVI Charter Yacht Industry Charts a Course for the Future

Rapid building of the USVI’s marine infrastructure following the 2017 hurricanes and VIPCA’s success in promoting charter yachts through international representation at its show, has led to the charter industry contributing \$45 million to the territory’s economy in 2019.

Looking ahead, industry professionals plan to continue this boom in three key ways. First, through a continued promotion of charter yacht tourism via a 2020 USVI Charter Yacht Show and such as work by VIPCA's board over the past year which has made it easier for VIPCA member yachts to charter to Puerto Rico's offshore islands of Culebra, Culebrita and Vieques, thus expanding itinerary offerings for USVI-based yachts. Secondly, by providing workforce training opportunities with the aim to bring more VI captains into the industry. A prime example is VIPCA's Marine Apprentice 'on the water' scholarship program with fiscal sponsorship provided by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands' (CFVI) Marine Rebuild Fund, which graduated its second class this summer. Third, by developing marine infrastructure to support the industry both on sea and onshore. Case in point, VIPCA has partnered with the Department of Planning & Natural Resources, Division of Coastal Zone Management for an Economic Development Authority grant to install 170 moorings out of a 200-mooring permit in various bays of the US Virgin Islands. The moorings will reduce anchoring near ecologically important coral reefs and sea grasses, as well as organize the bays to appeal for transient vessels.

"There are two reasons why both the show and charter industry as a whole has grown so much recently. One, on the show side, is that the 5 Platinum Anchor level IGY Marina's Yacht Haven Grande really is the best venue imaginable, further demonstrated by its being named in 2019 'Towergate's Superyacht Marina of the Year'. Secondly, and industry-wise, is that this really is one heck of a destination! Easy (passport free even) to get to, with islands every way you sail with exotic tropical bays to drop a hook and explore above and below water, new infrastructure, new waterfront bars and restaurants, new destinations with Puerto Rico and even a new public quay opening on the historic Charlotte Amalie waterfront," says Oriel Blake, VIPCA executive director.

Mark Your Calendar for 2020

The next USVI Charter Yacht Show will take place November 12-15, 2020. For more information, visit: www.vipca.org

Sponsors of the USVI Charter Yacht show include the USVI Department of Tourism; Yacht Haven Grande; IGY Marinas; Offshore Marine; Gowrie Group; Denison Yacht Sales; Moe's Fresh Market; Captain Morgan, distributed by Bellows International; Stoli, distributed by West Indies Company; Northern Lights Generators, distributed by Parts and Power; the Charter Yacht Broker Association; Cardow Jewelers; Harbor Shoppers; La Royale Cosmetics; and the Pamilco Group.

SIDEBAR: 2019 USVI CHARTER YACHT SHOW COMPETITION WINNERS

Best Themed Yacht Hop: Blue Pepper

Best In Show (up to 55'): Karma

Best in Show (56' to 65'): Blue Pepper

Best in Show (66' and up): SeaGlass

Best Crew in Show: Daniel and Hazal Brown on Azulia II

Culinary Competition

1st Entree – Desree Pierce, Amazing Grace

2nd Entree – Jade Konst, Xenia 50

3rd Entrée – Blair Barbour, Mahasattva

1st Dessert – Desree Pierce, Amazing Grace

2nd Dessert – Denise Melton, Blue Pepper

3rd Dessert – Jade Konst, Xenia 50

Best Stoli Cocktail sponsored by Stoli - Catatonic

Best Captain Morgan Cocktail sponsored by Captain Morgan - Columbia

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