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## U.S. Tourist Board Sends Creatives to USVI to Market Territory

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Ernice Gilbert **December 05, 2019**

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**Chef Digby Stridiron, center, at the AMA Restaurant in Cane Bay By. Ernice Gilbert for VI Consortium.**

Since Tuesday, a content producing company called Beautiful Destinations has been on St. Croix documenting the island's beauty, key locations, and some local influencers, including ubiquitous chef Digby Stridiron, who along with his AMA restaurant in Cane Bay were featured on Wednesday.

Beautiful Destinations will spend its last day on St. Croix today and travel to St. Thomas and St. John Friday to continue capturing the islands' amazing scenery, captivating features and history. The group of four will remain in the territory through Dec. 11.

They were hired by the U.S. Tourist Board as part of Brand USA's latest marketing push called United Stories. "As tourism continues to bounce back after hurricane damage, Brand USA's campaign looks to share the USVI's beauty and inviting personalities with the rest of the globe," Brand USA said in an email to the Consortium.



USVI talent to be featured include the following:

- Nellie O'Rielly – Owner of Sonya's (STX), famed jewelry store known for hook bracelets
- Chef Digby – Tour Guide / Chef (STT)
- Lisa Homsy – Scuba Diver from Canada (she is a social influencer) who will be helping the United Stories campaign explore USVI (Instagram: @LisaHomsy)

Brand USA said the USVI feature "takes viewers through USVI in 24 hours. Spend the day island hopping between St. Croix, St. Thomas & St. John. Bike up to point Udall in St. Croix at sunrise, sip your coffee while on the fast ferry to St. Thomas for an authentic Caribbean lunch and drive by the 99 steps. Park your car on the ferry over to St. John for an evening snorkel and sundowners at Trunk Bay."

Once the production is completed, Brand USA said viewers will experience the USVI as they explore the past, enjoy the present and look to the future:

- St. Croix (past): The big and mighty, historically and culturally rich St. Croix seen through the forging of the Crucian hook lore bracelet.
- St. John (present): Quaint and iconic, this island retreat is a unique getaway serving up outdoor adventures through the view of a seasoned diver and native St. Johnian.
- St. Thomas (future): Everyone's favorite go-to island becoming quickly the new melting pot of the U.S. seen by the eyes of a returning visitor.

Yelena Jeune, Beautiful Destinations producer, said once the content is produced, it will be featured on the U.S. Tourist Board's social platforms, which collectively has millions of followers. "We're producing a bunch of really fun, creative content for them that promotes tourism to St. Croix and also to the USVI as a whole," she said. This trip is Beautiful Destination's first ever visit to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Ms. Jeune made known, and team members, she added, have been enjoying their stay.



"We're really excited, we've been here for two days and it's going great so far," she added.

At AMA on Wednesday, Mr. Stridiron created settings that allowed Beautiful Destinations to film what the restaurant -- and Mr. Stridiron -- do regularly: cook great food and serve it to eager patrons. The settings included Mr. Stridiron cooking on the lower floor of the restaurant, and guests dining on the upper courtyard.

The promotion comes at a great time for the USVI. The islands, following the ravaging of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, have been on the rebound, with hotels reopening this year and some scheduled to reopen in 2020. Airlift to the territory has dramatically increased, according to

Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, who revealed during the territory's recent Revenue Estimating Conference that air visitor arrivals from January to September in 2019 were up 43 percent from the same period in 2018. He also said the territory currently has 2,450 traditional accommodations; 900 villas; 2,100 Airbnb units; and 200 charters, with an additional 1,106 rooms becoming available when Carambola, Divi, Marriott's Frenchman's Reef and Noni Beach reopen by the third quarter of 2020.

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