The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cuba's Opening Could Have "Significant Impact" On Virgin Islands, Tourism Commissioner Says

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The Virgin Islands Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty has lauded the Dec. 17 move by President Barack Obama to normalize relations between the U.S. and Cuba, which will see the communist Caribbean island becoming a new destination for travel and commerce, saying that it raises awareness to the Caribbean as a destination. However, Nicholson-Doty is mindful of the impact the historic move could have on the Virgin Islands.

"The opening of Cuba to travelers from the United States may also create increased competition for visitors to the Caribbean," she said. "Though the rest of the world has long had access to visit Cuba, this change could have a significant impact on the U.S.

v nearly 90 percent of our visitors from the U.S."

Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty

Nicholson-Doty, who will resign her position of Commissioner of Tourism by January 5, a part of the standard procedure required with an incoming administration, said the department must continue to diversify in order to keep up with the ever-changing landscape.

"For instance, we anticipate the cruise itineraries in the Western Caribbean will begin to call on ports in Cuba. We have to continue to do what we have started to remain competitive -- augment our proactive marketing efforts, champion infrastructure enhancements, create appealing attractions, and improve our customer service," she said.

Though the new competition from Cuba will be mulled over in various tourism departments throughout the Caribbean as executives search for ideas to remain strong, the Caribbean, Nicholson-Doty said, has become accustomed to competition from emerging markets, and remains confident that the territory will continue to invest in short- and long-term plans.

"The U.S. Virgin Islands, along with our Caribbean neighbors, is accustomed to competition for tourism spending from emerging destinations. As a territory, we understand the need to focus on our short- and long-term strategies to build our industry, and will continue to invest in the quality and diversity of our product to ensure we remain top of mind among U.S. visitors," she said.

Last Wednesday, President Obama declared he would lift a 50-year embargo the U.S. had placed on Cuba, normalizing relations with the country by allowing families to send more money to relatives there, easing travel restrictions and allowing American corporations to do business in the communist land.

On Saturday, in a wide-ranging speech, Cuban President Raul Castro said the move by Obama was a victory for the Cuban Revolution, and thanked President Obama for the "new chapter." President Castro, the brother of 88-year-old revolutionary Fidel Castro, who helped launch the Cuban Revolution from 1953-1959, also reaffirmed restored relations with the U.S., but said Obama's move would not put an end to communism in Cuba.

Image Credit: Havensight waterfront in St. Thomas courtesy "Have Fun With Us"