

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Editorial: WICO's Development Workshops For Tourism-Based Businesses A Success

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The West Indian Company, Ltd. recently hosted a two-day business development workshop for entrepreneurs interested in starting their own tourism-related business.

We frequently receive inquiries from people who want to either start a business or expand their existing business into the tourism industry, and more pointedly the cruise industry. Because WICO was founded primarily to assist our economy, workshops in both districts were a way to encourage the territorial economy on a fundamental level: through small business development. They also were a way to encourage diversity in our tourism product.

According to the 2012 Census Bureau's Economic Census of Island Areas, the U.S. has 1,100 businesses. Of those businesses, 23.2 percent are retail; 11.6 percent are food service and 5.3 percent are jewelry.



Joseph Boschulte, President/CEO, WICO

The 102 enthusiastic and engaged residents who attended were a mix of seasoned and aspiring tour operators as well as entrepreneurs with unique, locally made products. Sixty-seven attended the St. Thomas workshop with thirty-five of their counterparts attending the St. Croix session.

With larger cruise ships bringing more people, additional tour operators will be needed to transport those who come ashore. And the enduring interest in cultural tourism means there is increasing demand for hand-made, one of a kind items that reflect the culture of the islands.

We are pleased with the workshops' overall results. Interest from the community shows there is still faith in the economy; that in spite of challenging times, the can-do, independent spirit of stepping out and taking a chance on the dream of business ownership is alive and well in these islands.

We were especially glad budding business owners took advantage of the opportunity to get advice from industry insiders. It's easy to want to have a business; the real challenge is having a business and making it successful. And that's why our sessions were less about the mechanics of starting a business and more on the finer points essential to success in the service industry.

Attendees received information on USVI tourism and the cruise industry that would help them better know their market and identify their ideal customer. They also learned about creating a destination experience; strategic partnerships; marketing and utilizing social media; and operations such as dealing with contracts, reports, invoicing, insurance and handling difficult situations. A great deal of emphasis was on providing service rather than making money.

According to the most recent Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association Business Research and Economic Advisors (BREA) survey on the Economic Impact of Cruise Tourism,

everything from the initial welcome, shore excursions, shopping, affordability, options for things to do, information about activities, friendliness and courtesy impact the cruise visitor experience.

The most popular expenditure was on shore excursions. Ninety-seven percent of the cruisers who participated in the survey disembarked from the ship and 55 percent – more than half of those who disembarked - invested in destination tours, the overwhelming majority of which were booked through their cruise line.

Cruise passengers who have a positive experience are likely to recommend not only a destination to friends, family and co-workers but the individual who made their visit memorable. If a service provider makes a strong, positive impression, there is a greater likelihood for repeat customers and business growth. The old adage proves true: Take care of your customers and your customers will take care of you.

WICO looks forward to hosting and participating more activities designed to unite our business community with the cruise/tourism industry. Our commitment to keeping the USVI as a premier port goes beyond bringing cruise ships to our dock. We also want to make sure businesses benefit not just by existing, but by connecting with potential customers, knowing how to meet their expectations and doing what it takes to succeed. The ripple effect in the community creates a win-win situation for all – whether we own a business or not.

Guest editorial by Joseph Boschulte, President/CEO, WICO

Feature Image: Cruise ship docked at the Ann Abramson E. Pier.