

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nicholson-Doty And Tourism Officials Unveil Territory Marketing Plan

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Beverly Nicholson Doty

ST. CROIX -- The Department of Tourism held its annual Marketing Plan Presentation and Review here and on St. Thomas yesterday, revealing to key stakeholders strategies set forth to promote the territory as the best place to vacation, get married and host a family reunion, among other offerings. The event was also to showcase the islands' culture, cuisine, exceptional landscape, as well as strengthening partnerships with major carriers to facilitate easy travel.

On St. Thomas, the invite-only occurrence was held at the Ritz-Carlton with a focus on that island's offerings and how to make it better. Here, the affair took place at the Buccaneer Hotel and, like the St. Thomas gathering, it held a direct focus on St. Croix's own unique tourism presentation, and how the department would work to make it better in 2016.

"This important document is the result of much discussion, debate and collaboration between Department representatives, key tourism stakeholders, and our advertising, marketing and public relations advisors," said Beverly Nicholson-Doty, commissioner of the Department of Tourism.

Some of the goals laid forth in the plan include increasing the amount of domestic and international tourists to the territory; increasing the amount of visitor expenditure on a yearly basis; improving community awareness and the value of tourism to the islands' economy; ensuring that the uniqueness of each island is well represented in marketing efforts; and building brand equity along with growth opportunities for St. Croix, and to maintain the same in the already well established market of St. Thomas.

"Fiscal Year 2015 has proven to be a year of growth for the accommodations sector, with increases in occupancy, average rate and length of stay." Mrs. Nicholson-Doty wrote in a message accompanying the marketing plan. "However, we continue to note challenges in our retail segment."

The commissioner added that cruise arrivals were flat year-on-year, and reduced summer calls "have been especially trying." Even so, Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said the territory realized land-based tourism growth in 2015, and said steps were being taken that would see long-term agreements stabilizing cruise calls to the territory.

"Overall, the trends suggest increased visitor arrivals and spending by Americans, who make up the majority of our visitor arrivals," she said.

In relation to domestic arrivals to the territory, data collected by the Bureau of Economic Research in 2014, which was compiled by DOT and included in the marketing plan, revealed the most lucrative market as New York, with 63,386 visits, followed by Florida with 50,378, and Massachusetts with 44,142. Other major markets included New Jersey, Texas, California, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Illinois and Connecticut, accounting for a combined 210,039 domestic visits to the territory in 2014.

International arrivals in 2014 saw Denmark topping the list with 10,885 visitors, followed by Canada with 6,502, the United Kingdom with 1,328, and Germany and Italy with a combined total of 2,359.

The 27-page booklet is well detailed, and includes everything from Bridal and Romance tourism to Military tourism. In the past, the department would place the marketing plan online for all to see; but this year Mrs. Nicholson-Doty decided to forego that strategy, as other islands, bent on uplifting their own tourism products, have gleaned key strategic points from the plan.

"We are resetting the dial and we look forward to 2016 with increased optimism as we enhance and grow our tourism product and, of course, our experience," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty concluded.

