

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Territory Must Prepare For Flow Of Affluent Chinese Tourists, Mapp Says

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp said on Tuesday at Government House here -- based on advice given to him by Chinese officials -- that the territory should prepare for the possibility of affluent Chinese tourists flowing into the U.S. Virgin Islands, stating that certain changes should be made to ensure that the tourists are properly accommodated.

The announcement came as part of a question posed to the governor in regards to his trade mission in China, a trip that was dominated by meetings with Sinopec and the oil giant's plans to invest in the territory, specifically Limetree Bay Terminals, the former HOVENSA Refinery. But included in the delegation were Dept. of Tourism officials as well, a calculated move by the governor to explore potential Chinese visit to the islands.

The government-run tourism organization in China, the governor said, advised him that once the territory becomes serious about developing tourism between China and the territory, certain changes should be made to accommodate the influx.

The governor said he was told that the U.S. Embassy in China approves 10 million visas to Chinese nationals annually, of which 3 million are tourists. And he was told by Chinese tourism officials that the tourists who would travel as far as the U.S. Virgin Islands for leisure, would be those with the wherewithal to do so, and so simple but important adjustments must be considered to ensure that their visits are memorable.

"[They] said to us once we start talking about developing tour packages and working to have visitors, hotels are going to need to be sensitized to some nuances that a Chinese visitor looks for," Mr. Mapp said. "For example --very simple but it's important to them -- 1) Making sure you have good quality robes in the room, and good slippers. 2) Making sure that it's not just coffee pots and teas, but they're looking for the ability to have noodles. 3) To ensure that in the economy there are authentic Chinese restaurants because that is one of the elements of dinning that they're going to be looking for. 4) Ensuring that you have high-end stores and having high-end products because Chinese nationals, particularly what they call the third-tier traveler, is looking to shop and shop on the high-end and shop extensively," Mr. Mapp said.

"And so in working with the embassy, and working with the tourism organization and the people in China, more of these are the kinds of developments that we have to share and will be sharing with our private sector partners to ensure that we're really open and ready to embrace another dimension in our economy," he said.

The territory's leader also noted that Chinese tourists often pass through the Cyril E. King Airport to travel to the B.V.I., and that efforts should be made to lure them here.

Even so, the governor said the focus on nurturing the new relationship with China would not impede longstanding ties at home and efforts already underway to grow the territory's economy. He called the China move a diversification of opportunities to increase the territory's economic standing, and said that the road projects that are coming online, and relationships with Economic Development Commission beneficiaries among other important relationships, would continue to be fostered.