

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department Of Tourism Shares Major Marketing Update; Will Invest \$2 Million In Next Three Months

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To help strengthen the territory's position as a premier warm weather destination and to address growing competition in the travel and tourism industry, the Department of Tourism (D.O.T.) will aggressively execute its overall marketing strategy by investing more than \$2 million over the next three months to ensure the territory is a top-of-mind choice for travelers to the Caribbean during the fall and the upcoming 2016-2017 winter season, D.O.T. announced late Friday.

D.O.T. Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty reported that both on-island and stateside national and international public relations, marketing and advertising teams have combined efforts to promote the territory's offerings to critical market segments.

Advertising The department is launching a robust campaign with more than \$1.5 million in advertising to promote the territory over the next 90 days. The campaign includes national ads airing on television and in print and digital outlets, and targets key markets and niche categories, such as Travel, Culinary, Marine, Military, Cruise, Film, and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE).

More than \$200,000 is specifically earmarked for print and digital advertising to promote the destination's Centennial. Digital activity will be geo-targeted internationally, while print ads are directed at Scandinavian communities within the United States who have the propensity to visit the USVI during the Centennial year in 2017.

Promotions In an effort to attract more visitors to the territory, the D.O.T. has also launched a number of promotions, including a NICE promotion for the summer, fall and winter seasons. Other promotions will be targeted to Dine VI, the Centennial, MICE, and the Caribbean and Military markets. There is also a Family Reunion promotion, designed to encourage Virgin Islanders living outside the territory to return home to reunite with their loved ones. All promotions are being tied into all overarching marketing activities.

Public Relations The public relations program will continue to focus on securing coverage in national, regional and multicultural media outlets to promote St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas. The program will incorporate media relations activity, including news releases promoting destination news and offerings, media interviews for key D.O.T. spokespersons, as well as proactive outreach (i.e. one-on-one deskside meetings and media pitching).

The department has executed a strong PR program for Fiscal Year 2016, with a YTD public relations value of more than \$11 million. This included feature placements in the Miami Herald, AFAR and NBCNews.com, as well as broadcast coverage on WCCO (CBS Minneapolis), WSB-AM (Atlanta), WAVS 1170 AM (Miami) and WPFW-FM 89.3 (Washington, DC).

Following the success of the Washington, DC in-market activation, which was planned to support the department's participation in the National Association of Black Journalists/National Association of Hispanic Journalists joint convention and has already generated an estimated value of more than \$195,000 (which represents a return on investment of 9:1), the department will host events in Orlando and Maryland during the next three months. In addition to promoting the territory to members of the media, D.O.T. will meet with travel agents, meeting planners, as well as USVI Tourism Ambassadors in those markets.

The department will amplify its media hospitality program by hosting journalists from top national, regional and multicultural publications to generate awareness through feature stories that showcase various facets of the destination. Plans are in the works to host a group of media from leading culinary, travel and lifestyle media for the upcoming Dine VI, which will take place on all three islands from October 27 to November 12.

Sales The department's sales team has been deeply engaged this summer, hosting five groups of travel agents from Atlanta, the Mid-Atlantic, the Midwest, New England and the Southeast. The team is also conducting reservations sales training with JetBlue Vacations in Orlando and Utah and for other agents in Northwest Illinois, Maryland,

Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia, as well as Madison, Wisconsin. Additionally, D.O.T. will host a webinar on the territory's gastronomic appeal for Virtuoso agents.

September's schedule includes hosting tour operators and journalists from Denmark, visits to Detroit, Ohio and Toronto, as well as participation in the Apple Vacations annual trade show and product launch in Chicago, Delta Vacations' trade show in Atlanta, and the AAA bridal show in Burlington, Massachusetts.

In October, the team participates in IMEX America, the largest hosted buyer program in North America, attracting thousands of buyers and exhibitors from the U.S. and around the world. Sales calls and training are also set for Boston, Connecticut, Indianapolis, Michigan and St. Louis, and participation in the Posh Travel consumer trade show in New Hampshire has been confirmed.

The team will also head to Puerto Rico to participate in the 23rd Annual FCCA Cruise Conference & Trade Show to promote the Territory's cruise ports and offerings. For this event, the Department of Tourism will subsidize registration for tour operators and attractions, giving local partners invaluable access to decision makers who plan shore excursions for cruise passengers.

The DEMA (Diving Equipment & Marketing Association) Dive Show in Las Vegas is a key November activity and will be supported by sales calls and agency training in Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. The team will also participate in the VSTA Trade Show in Vermont.

Airlift In a continued effort to increase airlift to the Territory, the Department of Tourism has announced new and additional service on Delta and United Airlines, bringing an increasing number of seats to St. Croix and St. Thomas during the fall and winter seasons.

Delta Air Lines will inaugurate a daily service from Atlanta to St. Croix for three weeks over the peak Christmas holiday season. The Atlanta-based carrier will augment twice weekly winter service from Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport to Henry E. Rohlsen Airport with daily flights from December 17, 2016 through January 7, 2017. The airline also will operate a third weekly flight between Atlanta and St. Croix during the first quarter of 2017. The new Monday service will begin on January 9 and continue through March 27, supporting Saturday and Wednesday flights.

Delta has also expanded service to St. Thomas for the winter travel season. The new flights will operate between Boston Logan International Airport and Cyril E. King International Airport from February 18 to July 22, 2017.

Following the success of daily nonstop service from Washington, DC, to St. Thomas this summer, United Airlines has announced daily flights from the DMV area (District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia) this winter season. The new flights will operate between Washington Dulles International Airport and Cyril E. King International Airport from Friday, December 16, 2016, through Monday, April 23, 2017.

Additionally, United has announced that it will operate a weekly Saturday service from George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas to St. Thomas for four weeks during the end-of-year holiday period. The service will start on Saturday, December 17,

2016, and run through Saturday, January 7, 2017.

More positive airlift news is the return of Norwegian Airlines' weekly service from Copenhagen, Denmark to St. Croix. The service, which will run from November 2016 through April 2017, will attract visitors from Scandinavia and throughout Europe to experience the history, culture and strong Danish influences throughout the island.

Film Deepening its outreach into the film industry remains a priority for D.O.T. The team is working on three major productions through the end of the calendar year in addition to hosting an international film crew from Denmark in November. The Department will also attend stateside trade shows and events that appeal to and attract the film, advertising and new media communities.

Training This month, the Department will resume its customer service training sessions for hundreds of tourism stakeholders from across the U.S. Virgin Islands. The training will be led by one of the world's leading experts in service excellence, Bryan Williams, a USVI native and dynamic keynote speaker, consultant and author. Dr. Williams will deliver sessions for airport representatives, supervisors, general employees and taxi operators on both St. Croix and St. Thomas.

The Department will also launch the "Taxi Text To Win" program next month to incentivize and motivate taxi operators to provide exceptional service. Each month, the program will reward taxi operators who receive the most positive feedback for excellent service. The prizes will be awarded to one taxi operator on each island.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty expressed confidence that this comprehensive approach, in partnership with the territory's tourism stakeholders, will help deliver promising returns to the territory as measured by visitor arrivals and combined direct and indirect economic impact.