

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department Of Tourism Gives Detailed Update On Territory's Progress Following 2017 Storms

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The Department of Tourism on Wednesday gave a wide-ranging update on key focus areas, among them airlines and accommodations, as well as information it provided at its recent budget hearing.

Airlines

D.O.T. said the territory will benefit from increased airlift in the coming months as Spirit Airlines inaugurates a new service while American Airlines and other carriers boost their operations. Spirit has started nonstop flights three times weekly between Fort Lauderdale (FLL) and St. Croix (STX) and will inaugurate service between Orlando International

Airport (MCO) and Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas (STT) with three flights a week, beginning November 8, 2018. Meanwhile, American - which already serves St. Croix and St. Thomas with flights twice daily from Miami to both destinations - will begin daily service between St. Thomas and Charlotte from November 4, 2018. In addition, the carrier will resume flights between Philadelphia and St. Thomas on December 19; and between New York and St. Thomas on December 22. United Airlines will offer daily nonstop service between Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) and St. Thomas this winter, while JetBlue Airways will resume its daily Boston-St. Thomas route between February 14, 2019, and April 22, 2019. The airline will continue to provide service to both St. Croix and St. Thomas from San Juan this winter. Delta Air Lines will continue serving St. Thomas with flights from New York and Atlanta as well as between Atlanta and St. Croix.

[St. Croix Air Capacity Graphic](#)

[St. Thomas Air Capacity Graphic](#)

Accommodations

More than 50 percent of accommodations across the territory are open and accepting guests while other properties continue to repair or rebuild. In terms of traditional overnight accommodations (hotels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, timeshares, etc.) there are now approximately 1,050 rooms available on St. Thomas, nearly 150 rooms on St. John, and around 600 units available on St. Croix. There are approximately 600 villa units and 200 charter yachts available on St. Thomas/St. John. On St. Croix, there are about 300 villa units. Currently, there are 830 Airbnb listings in St. Thomas, 250 in St. John, and 350 in St. Croix.

Destination Symposium

Tour operators and online travel agents were warmly welcomed to the territory in August as they received a firsthand look of what is in store for the upcoming winter season. The five-day Destination Symposium, produced by the U.S. Virgin Islands Hotel and Tourism Association, included visits to St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John; island tours; appointments with hospitality partners; and opportunities to experience many popular USVI attractions.

Budget Hearing

The Department of Tourism presented its Fiscal Year 2019 budget request of \$20,668,404 to the 32nd Legislature this month. During the presentation, the team highlighted priorities for FY 2019, including the provision of historical and heritage training for all frontline employees in the tourism industry, rolling out a "Made in the Virgin Islands" program, improving the cruise-passenger experience with new harbor transportation on St. Thomas, increasing cruise calls to St. Croix, and transitioning from Still Nice back to Real Nice.

Representatives from the Department of Tourism have been actively promoting the Territory and its offerings at industry events, trade shows and conferences.

In July, the Department of Tourism joined the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) in Miami to support the organization's efforts to promote excellence in journalism, while sharing updates and showcasing the cultural attributes of the Virgin Islands.

The USVI had a strong presence at the 5th Annual International Multicultural & Heritage Tourism Summit & Trade Show last month in Miami. The Department participated in panel discussions, attended meetings, networked with delegates and shared USVI culture with attendees.

The USVI participated in CVENT Connect, one of the largest buyer-and-supplier trade shows in Las Vegas. Updates were shared with incentive and group-meeting planners, such as HSMAI (Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International), and MPI (Meeting Professionals International). The destination also was represented at the Caribbean Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange in Riviera Maya in August for two days of one-on-one appointments. Strong connections were made with sales organizations such as HPN Global, Altour and Maritz Travel.

Members of the travel industry in the Detroit area joined the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism for a special presentation about the destination's recovery and the status of attractions, restaurants and activities this month. Representatives from Delta Air Lines and Delta Vacations also supported the event, which was attended by travel and cruise consultants, meeting planners and media.

The Department of Tourism attended and supported the 43rd annual National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ) convention, held in Detroit from August 1-5. The USVI's dynamic Spectrum Band was the official house band for this renowned media convention, welcoming participants to the opening ceremony and other events. More than 3,000 media representatives attended the convention.

Earlier this month, St. Thomas chef and professional boxer Julius Jackson shared Virgin Islands cuisine with a group of journalists in New York City as he launched his first cookbook - My Modern Caribbean Kitchen: 70 Fresh Takes on Island Favorites.

As part of its marketing strategy to invest in sports tourism in the territory, the Department attended the Rogers Cup Tennis Tournament in Toronto, Canada, this month to build on plans to launch an annual tennis tournament in St. Croix next year.

In Washington, D.C. this month, the Department supported a concert featuring Virgin Islands artist Pressure Busspipe, which was attended by a number of Virgin Islands Tourism Ambassadors in the DMV area.

A representative from the Department of Tourism attended NY NOW to support the efforts of about a dozen vendors from the USVI, who traveled to New York to participate in this wholesale products and innovative designs trade show. The delegation was led by Nadine Marchena Kean of the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority (EDA) and showcased locally made items, ranging from beauty products to handcrafted art and glass, and tea made from local ingredients.

The Department of Tourism attended the Sunshine Education Summit, an MPI trade show in Jacksonville, Florida. Meeting planners, who attend the show, focus their sales

efforts on the Southeast U.S. as well as Puerto Rico and the USVI.

In September, the Department will have a presence at Caribbean Cultural Fest in New York, the SKAL CLUB NJ-based travel agent event, Destination Caribbean in the Bahamas, the Society of Travel Writers Convention in Barbados, Seatrade Cruise Med in Lisbon, and Circle of Sisters Expo in New York.

Media Relations

The Department partnered with Adobe, creators of digital imaging software Lightroom CC, to host journalists and photographers on St. Thomas and St. John last month. The group's mission was to tell a story through photography of the islands' natural beauty, vibrant culture and resilience, capturing scenes at destinations including downtown Charlotte Amalie, Trunk Bay, Paradise Point and Sapphire Beach. Additionally, Adobe partnered with the Department of Tourism to host a mobile photography workshop for local students.

The Department of Tourism also hosted a journalist from Cruise Critic on St. Thomas and St. John, who covered the Territory's recovery from last September's storms. The writer visited sites such as Magens Bay, Mountain Top and Trunk Bay, while also interviewing stakeholders in the hospitality industry.

An intra-Caribbean trip for writers and agents in the region is also in the works for St. Thomas, and the Department will be hosting journalists for this year's Crucian Christmas Festival on St. Croix. As part of its media-hospitality program, the Department will continue to host journalists to explore the islands and get destination updates.

Representatives from the Department continue to share destination updates with the media by conducting interviews, participating in panel discussions and attending industry conferences.