

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## After Serving 12 Years As Commissioner Of Tourism, Beverly Nicholson-Doty Resigns

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Ernice Gilbert **December 12, 2018**



Beverly Nicholson-Doty, one of the most respected leaders in the U.S. Virgin Islands, who has led the Department of Tourism longer than any other commissioner before her, on Monday submitted her letter of resignation to Governor Kenneth Mapp, The Virgin Islands Consortium can confirm.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty's resignation is significant; no other individual in the U.S.V.I. has a better understanding on topics of the territory's most important product, tourism, than the 12-year commissioner. Her knowledge is so vast that it would behoove the incoming Bryan administration to seek out her advice as new leadership takes hold.

When asked to confirm what this publication had learned from veritable sources, Mrs. Nicholson-Doty issued the following statement to The Consortium on Tuesday: "On Monday, December 10, I submitted my letter of resignation to Governor Kenneth E. Mapp. Thursday, December 27, 2018, will be my last day serving as Commissioner of the Department of Tourism.

"I would like to thank both Governor Mapp for the confidence he placed in me, and Governor John P. de Jongh Jr., who first appointed me to this position over a decade ago. Equally important, I owe a debt of gratitude to the people of the Virgin Islands for allowing me to serve our territory.

"For almost 12 years it has been an honor to lead the outstanding professionals who have contributed to the Department's mission.

"I remain committed to helping promote the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"In accordance with the process, the Department of Tourism is finalizing a comprehensive transition document to share with the incoming administration's transition team.

"I stand ready to assist to ensure there is a smooth passing of the baton to the new leadership of the Department of Tourism.

"I wish all Virgin Islanders, a blessed holiday season and a happy 2019."

In January 2015, in announcing his decision to retain Mrs. Nicholson-Doty to lead the Department of Tourism following her 8-year tenure with former Governor John P. de Jongh, Governor Mapp praised the commissioner for her outstanding work. "Let me publicly thank Commissioner of Tourism designee, Beverly Nicholson-Doty, for agreeing to remain on board and continuing the fine job she has been doing in the tourism industry for our territory," [he said](#).



Beverly Nicholson-Doty and her son in Sept. 2015 at a Gov't House ceremony on St. Croix. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

With about 20 percent of the territory's workforce employed in the tourism industry in 2015, Mr. Mapp's charge to Mrs. Nicholson-Doty was to maintain the territory's competitive edge by "greatly improving the visitor experience." The commissioner had to accomplish this with no additional funding and while the U.S.V.I. government was experiencing its worst financial crisis. The territory was also facing a decline in cruise passengers, as cruise line officials complained about the destination as being stale and lacking innovation. It was a complaint that Mrs. Nicholson-Doty had relayed to government officials on a number of occasions, but the destination's infrastructure had yet to see improvements because of funding issues.

The governor held the commissioner's concerns in mind, and in October, the Mapp administration announced that [water transportation](#) ferrying cruise ship passengers from both the West Indian Company (WICO) dock and the Austin "Babe" Monsanto Marine Terminal dock in Crown Bay — an action that has been sought for years but never came to fruition — would commence in November. The announcement represents a major development in the territory's main cruise tourism destination, Charlotte Amalie, and has been hailed by top cruise ship officials as a game changer for the U.S.V.I.

"If you have a great product which is the water, being able to showcase that [Charlotte Amalie] harbor to folks getting off that cruise ship, and to be able to show everything that is able to be seen from the water, is just amazing what it's going to do for what people see when they view St. Thomas," said Carlos Torres de Navarra, who serves as the vice president of commercial port operations at Carnival Cruise Line.

The Veterans Drive Improvement Project, [which in May broke grounds](#) under the current administration after being stalled for over 30 years, [was said to be ahead of schedule in November](#). Once completed, the project is expected to be another boost for the Virgin Islands' tourism product.

Because her tenure spanned 12 years, Mrs. Nicholson-Doty had to steer tourism through some tumultuous times. In 2012, when HOVENSA shuttered, the territory's reliance on tourism became greater and there was added pressure on the commissioner to deliver even more results. During those times, Charlotte Amalie was already the top cruise ship destination in the Caribbean.

When the financial crisis struck the USVI in 2016 following the bond market's refusal to lend money to the local government, the commissioner had to make do with less, even as the need to improve the product grew, with competing destinations enhancing their own offerings.



Department of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-

Doty.

But perhaps the commissioner's greatest challenge during her 12-year leadership at D.O.T. was the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The storms had decimated the territory's tourism product. However, in less than a year, after being struck by two Category 5 storms, St. Thomas had received a total of 718,275 passengers through July 2018 compared to 929,056 passengers arriving during the same period in 2017. St. Croix had realized an increase with 48,836 passengers through May 2018 versus 24,742 passengers during all of 2017. As for air travel, St. Thomas's air capacity in August 2018 sat at around 10,000 seats weekly, representing about 50 percent of the capacity for the same period in 2017. On St. Croix, air capacity was more than 5,000 seats weekly in August, which was slightly higher than the same period in 2017.

"The forecast for Winter 2018/2019 projects St. Thomas's air capacity to be 15,000+ seats weekly and St. Croix to be slightly more than 6,000 seats weekly," Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said during a Senate hearing.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty also furnished information to lawmakers provided by Airbnb. Airbnb said as of August it had 830 listings in St. Thomas, 250 in St. John, and 350 in St. Croix. "The availability of accommodations in the sharing economy has made it possible for many people to travel to the territory, especially during our recovery period," the commissioner said. "Year-to-date, St. Thomas has received 10,200 visitors staying in Airbnb properties, St. John has received 2,200 guests, and 4,800 people have stayed in Airbnb locations on St. Croix. This does not include guest bookings through other sharing accommodations rental services. The agreement the government has in place with Airbnb allows for the collection by Airbnb of the 12.5 percent Hotel Room Occupancy Tax on behalf of hosts and subsequent remittance of those funds to the V.I. Bureau of Internal Revenue."

But even with the department's best efforts, the damage wrought by storms Irma and Maria will take years to fix, as acknowledged by the commissioner in August. At the time, she confirmed that more than 50 percent of the territory's traditional hotel accommodations remained closed. "Several properties have provided timelines for reopening beginning at the end this calendar year through the end of calendar year



2019,” she said.

The commissioner said of the more than 4,500 pre-storm available traditional overnight accommodations (hotels, bed and breakfasts, resorts, timeshares, etc.), there were approximately 1,800 available as of August 2018 territory-wide (approximately 1,050 rooms in St. Thomas, nearly 150 rooms in St. John, and around 600 rooms in St. Croix).

And while the cruise industry recovered quicker because of its movable assets, the territory was already experiencing a steep decline in cruise visits before Hurricanes Irma and Maria, because of a product that experts had [deemed as stale and in need of innovation](#) -- an action that is out of D.O.T.'s control.

Mrs. Nicholson-Doty, then, leaves a strong legacy of competence and accomplishments. She also cultivated a set of employees at D.O.T. devoted to professionalism, which helped in shaping the narrative that the Department of Tourism stands as a shining star amongst other government arms.