

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Divi Resort To Reopen December 2019, 'Subject To Availability Of Material And Labor'

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ST. CROIX -- A Divi Carina Bay Resort official on Tuesday told Casino Control Commission (CCC) commissioners that work on rebuilding the hotel was ongoing, and that a projected reopening date was set for December 2019.

That's according to the hotel's general manager, Andreas Conhoff, who was invited to the CCC to give an update on the construction taking place at the hurricane-damaged resort. Divi Carina Bay was devastated by Hurricane Maria, with the storm ripping through many of the hotel's rooms, while ravaging the beachfront -- completely destroying its sidewalks and other development near the water.

Mr. Conhoff said the resort had secured O'Reilly Plumbing and Construction as the contractor to complete the work, and gave updates on a number of ongoing projects in the rebuilding effort.



Hurricane Maria ravaged the beachfront of the Divi Carina Bay Hotel. The picture above shows ongoing reconstruction (Credit: VI Consortium)

He said the contractor's demolition work, which included the removal of debris and furniture from the hotel's first floor rooms, the east wing, west wing, and west wing 2, removal of all furniture from the west wing on the third floor, among other such labor was completed. He said the rebuilding of the resort's sidewalk in front of the west wing as of Tuesday was 50 percent complete, and construction to rebuild steps leading from the pool area to the beach would commence on April 1. Roof repairs on Villa buildings 1, 2, 3, and 4, have been completed, Mr. Conhoff made known.

DIVI officials had in August 2018 presented a plan of reconstruction following Hurricane Maria in September 2017, and had projected that various sections of the resort would have been completed by May 2019. However, Mr. Conhoff said the greatest cause of the yearlong setback was a delay in securing roofing material, which hindered other projects as the roof work had to be completed before other efforts could get underway. Additional delays included unavailability of dumpsters and a holdup in securing labor permits for a warehouse.

"We therefore anticipate the resort to be open December 2019, subject to the availability of material and labor," Mr. Conhoff said.

The closure of the Divi Carina Bay Resort following the 2017 storms was a blow felt by the hospitality sector of the tourism industry in the VI, specially St. Croix. In August of last year during a Committee on Finance hearing, then-Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Beverly Nicholson-Doty, said 50 percent of the territory's traditional hotels remained closed following the storms.



Hurricane Maria ravaged the beachfront of the Divi Carina Bay Hotel. The picture above shows ongoing reconstruction (Credit: VI Consortium)

“Several properties have provided timelines for reopening beginning at the end this calendar year through the end of calendar year 2019,” Mrs. Nicholson-Doty said in August.

At the time, she 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 territory wide (approximately 1,050 rooms in St. Thomas, nearly 150 rooms in St. John, and around 600 rooms in St. Croix). Additionally, there were more than 600 villas and 200 charter yachts available in St Thomas/St. John. In St. Croix, there were about 300 villa units.

Helping with the demand and lack of supply were properties listed on Airbnb, which at the time 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,” Mrs. Nicholson-Doty 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.”