

The Virgin Islands Consortium

People Traveling To USVI Want More Authentic Experiences, Boschulte Says

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Joseph Boschulte, Department of Tourism Commissioner Designee, has asserted that local people and local experiences have become the biggest draw for travelers to the territory, D.O.T. said Tuesday.

Speaking to participants at the recent Caribbean Hotel & Resort Investment Summit (CHRIS) in Miami, Florida, Mr. Boschulte said that studies have shown that the focus for visitors has shifted over the past few years from shopping and beaches to culture and the people. "What we've found is that we still get almost two million people a year, but the focus is now on the soul of the territory, which is our food, our music, our arts, and most importantly our people," he said.

Responding to these shifts has been a priority for the territory to retain its leading status in the region, D.O.T. said. "First and foremost, from a tourism leadership position, we have to understand the market, why people travel to the Caribbean. Once we understand that, then it's our job to make sure our destination meets those needs of people who travel to our part of the region," said Mr. Boschulte, who participated in a panel discussion on "The Cultural and Experiential Value Proposition for Hotels/Resorts".

Research indicated that visitors were increasingly seeking experiences and connections with locals. "They want to hang out in a bar where they see local people," said Mr. Boschulte. "They want to go out to a restaurant where they see people that don't look like them. They want to be able to say, 'Hey, I ate what that person ate.'"



Joseph Boschulte, Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Designee

This search for authentic experiences, he reported, has been more pronounced in the cruise sector: "There's clear data showing visitors traveling on cruise ships are moving away from shopping and jewelry. They're still going to the beaches, and still very comfortable with attractions, but there have to be more attractions than just beaches." The new trend, he asserted, is changing the way the USVI needs to be promoted: "It's our job as marketers now to go out and tell people, you can find that experience in the territory, and you can come in and you can sit with people and be safe."

The commissioner designee also reminded investors and financiers attending the Miami conference of the special advantages of the U.S. Virgin Islands: "You don't have to have a passport to come to the territory, you can use the U.S. dollar, and your cell phone works."

Another trend the tourism department is responding to is the increase in multi-generational travelers, according to the release: "Part of our challenge is to make sure we have activities for the grandparents, the parents, and the kids, because we all know that if you spend a week together in the same (villa) you've got to find other things for everybody to do. Not everybody wants to sit by the pool. So, I think part of our job as a destination is to make sure that we have the necessary accommodations for multigenerational or 3G travelers."

According to D.O.T., Mr. Boschulte said the damage sustained by the bigger hotels and the resulting loss of hotel rooms turned into a bonanza for local residents willing to rent their properties through Airbnb or directly to visitors who quickly saw the advantages of the sharing economy: "They branched out and figured they could stay in a house, everybody could have their own space in the house, and it would be cheaper, more economical, and they enjoy it."