

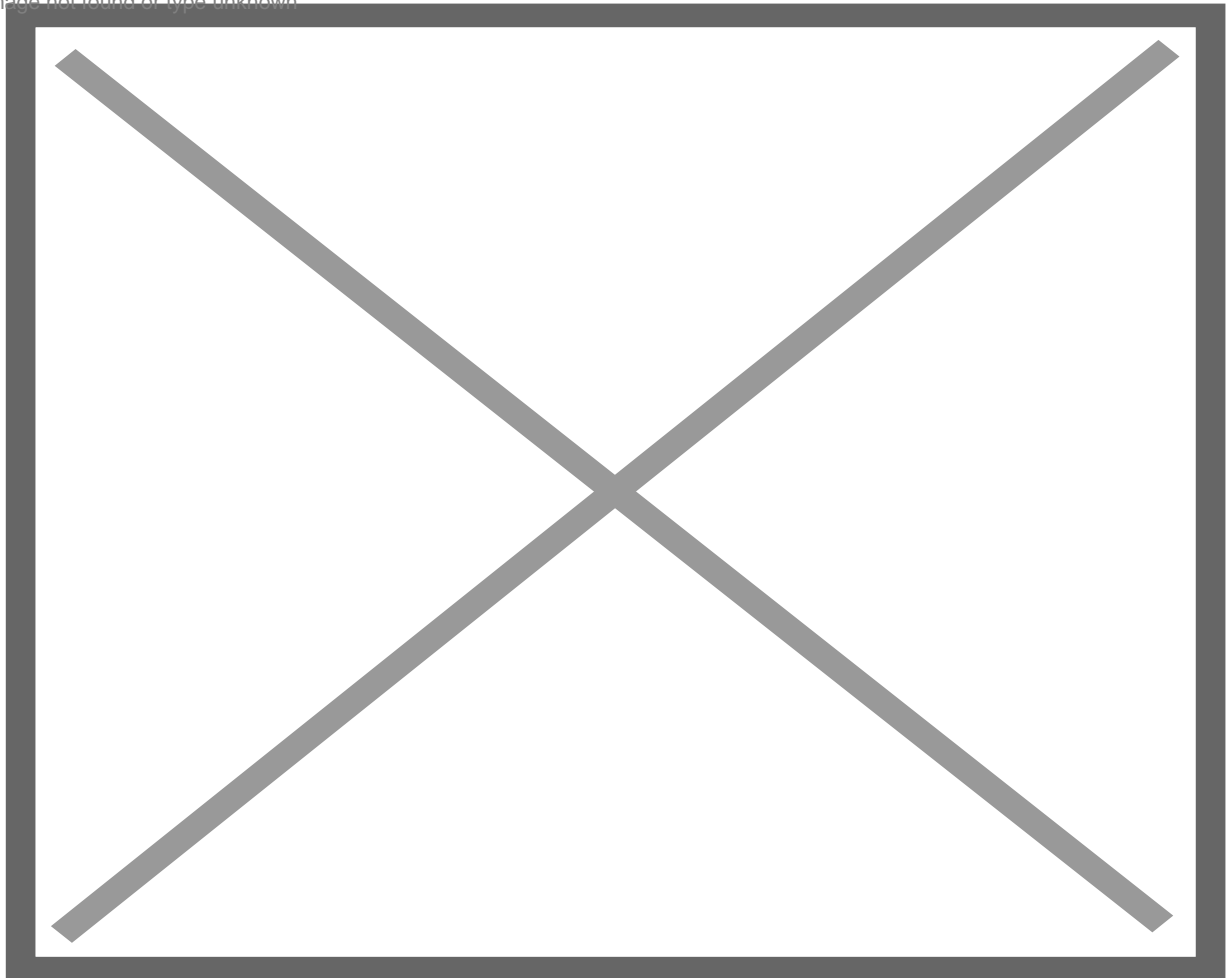
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TravelZoo Members Rate USVI as Number 1 Destination They'd Most Likely Visit Over Next 2 Years

Experience the USVI / **Published On September 04, 2020 05:53 PM /**

Staff Consortium **September 04, 2020**

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The U.S. Virgin Islands has been listed by Travelzoo's U.S. members as the destination they would most like to visit in the Caribbean over the next two years, the Dept. of Tourism has announced.

Travelzoo, a leading global travel company with 30 million members worldwide, reports the Caribbean should be prepared for a return of North Americans seeking warmth and refuge from the lockdowns and strictures of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, D.O.T. said.

In a recent survey of its widely traveled membership, D.O.T. said Travelzoo found that the key to bringing travelers back to the Caribbean lies in providing visitors timely and accurate travel

restriction information, and cleaning and disinfecting guidelines. Other factors include visitor safety, travel deals, a low or declining number of COVID-19 cases, flight availability and fewer restrictions, such as mandatory quarantine and curfews.

D.O.T. Commissioner Joseph Boschulte was upbeat about the results of the August 7 to 10, 2020 survey, which were disclosed during a recent webinar entitled "Gauging Consumer Travel Sentiments: Travelzoo's Caribbean Travel Outlook" hosted by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association.

The results, which placed the USVI ahead of The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, Aruba and Puerto Rico (in that order), was "a comforting confirmation of the efficacy of intelligent and efficient actions by the people of the USVI, led by Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and his special teams assembled to cope with the COVID-19 challenge," Mr. Boschulte said, according to D.O.T.

The yearning by pandemic-restricted North Americans for relaxing and recuperative vacations in the warmth of the Caribbean, he added, "was matched by the people of the Territory who eschewed so much of their normal lives and rose valiantly to deal with the drastic challenges of COVID-19 in a way which helps us to carefully reopen our borders: Our residents are taking to heart Governor Bryan's call for 'short-term pain for long-term gain'."

According to the release, Mr. Boschulte believes the Travelzoo survey results validate the territory's emphasis on clearly enunciated and carefully implemented health and security protocols and industry guidelines, including the importance of wearing a mask in the public. "Our focus on health, hygiene and safety obviously resonated with these well-traveled people whose opinions are heeded by other potential travelers," he said.

The commissioner said it was important to ensure there was ample and accurate communication to assure the health and safety of travelers, which is why the USVI Travel Screening Portal was such a timely innovation. The portal, developed by the Department of Tourism and the Department of Health, in close coordination with the Governor's office and the Virgin Islands Port Authority, screens travelers prior to arrival, the release said. "In addition to controlling any spread of COVID-19, the portal will be continually improved to provide a more efficient arrivals experience and guidelines for seamless stays for our visitors as well as residents returning home," said Mr. Boschulte.

D.O.T. said Travelzoo's survey "underscored the need in the coming months to continue to present accurate information on COVID-19 containment efforts as well as being adaptable to the rapidly changing visitor demands for competitive prices and responsive upsells."

As of Thursday, the USVI had recorded a total of 1,150 positive Covid-19 cases, 84 of which remain action — 16 on St. Croix, 63 on St. Thomas and 6 on St. John, according to the V.I. Department of Health. Sixteen people in the territory have died from the virus: 10 on st. Thomas, 5 on St. Croix and 1 on St. John. A total of 15,790 people in the USVI tested negative for the virus as of Thursday.