

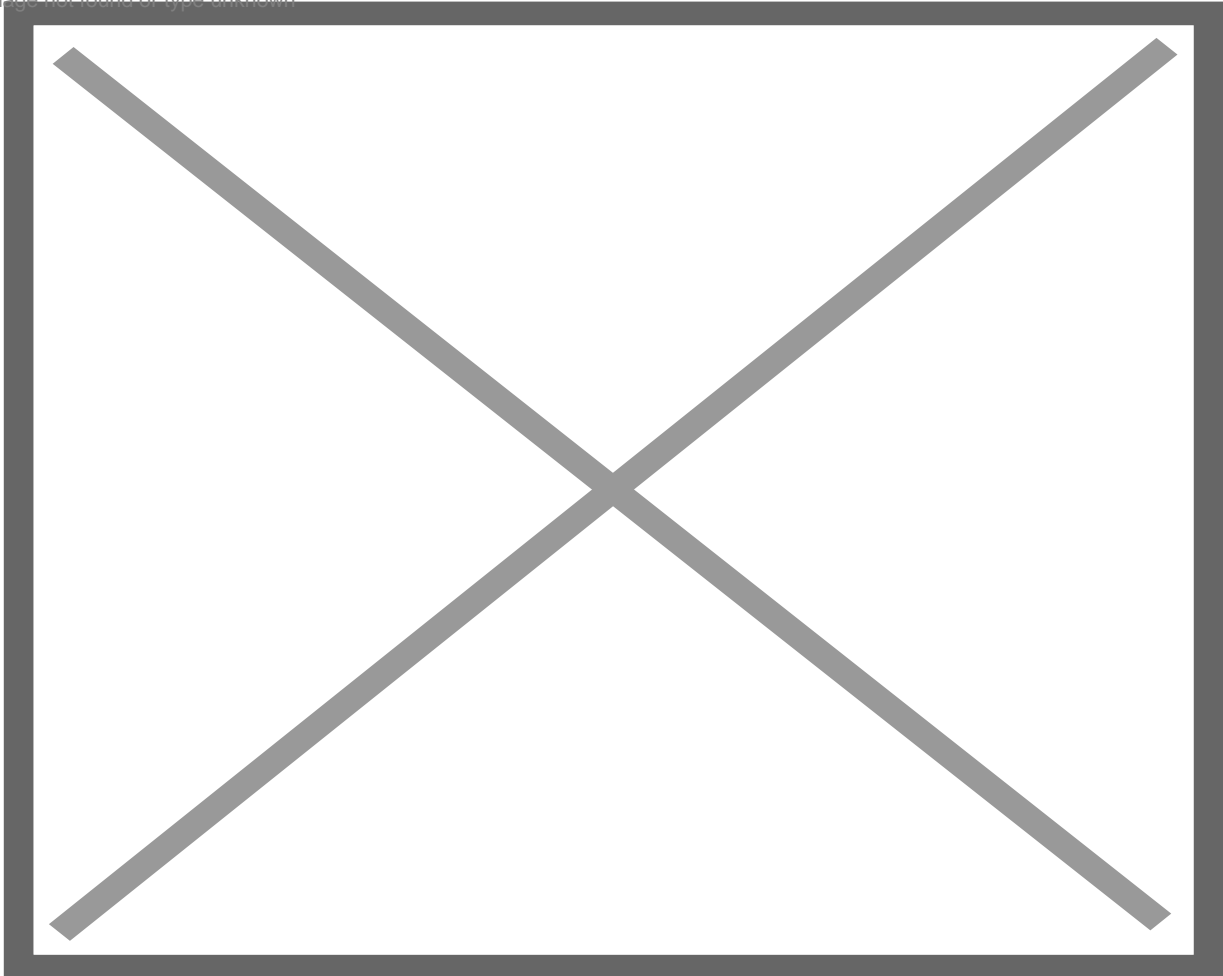
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Sports Will Help Tourism Sector's Post-Pandemic Revival, Dept. of Tourism Says

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Noting the increasing importance of sports tourism to the post-Covid-19 revival of the U.S. Virgin Islands' visitor industry, V.I. Dept. of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte pledged to leverage the territory's "natural appeal and growing complement of facilities to attract athletes to practice and compete on and off our shores," according to a release issued by D.O.T. Friday.

Addressing the USVI Senate Committee on Youth, Sports, Parks & Recreation earlier this week along with Commissioner of Sports, Parks & Recreation Calvert White, and Virgin Islands Sports Commission Chairman Leon Hunt, Mr. Boschulte said promoting the benefits of the territory's sporting capabilities and infrastructure as critical, in addition to extended seasons for training and the enjoyment of a year-round tropical climate.

“In addition, teams won’t have to worry about passports as they are not needed for U.S. citizens, and we have top-rated facilities as well as U.S. standards and coaches to provide oversight,” he said.

The tourism commissioner reported that although one of the territory’s major sports events, the Paradise Jam Basketball tournament, which attracts an influx of college teams, their friends, families, supporters and officials over the Thanksgiving period, was hosted virtually from Washington, DC, due to COVID-19, the USVI was prominently positioned at the event.

“Our [Department of Tourism] members coordinated and conducted daily on-site interviews, which are being shared on television and social media. Best of all is that we ran advertisements and marketing promotions that gained national exposure. We were title sponsors, and as a result, the USVI received national exposure on ESPN. However, we also were carried on other major outlets such as NBC and the Washington Post,” he reported.

Pointing to more recent sports tourism activities, he stated the marine industry was another opportunity to enhance the overall tourism product: “We have already begun to build on its potential as the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to expand on this important sector that serves an affluent population.”

The commissioner said in 2019 the annual direct contribution to the U.S. Virgin Islands economy made by 150 week/term charter vessels, 75 day charter, 17 sport-fishing and 55 bareboat charter vessels was estimated at approximately US\$45 million. “We forecast 2020 numbers to be positive due to the large number of visiting vessels, as well as our expanded reach into the charter yacht, regatta and game fishing sectors.”

Mr. Boschulte reported this year’s U.S. Virgin Islands Charter Yacht Show successfully brought large numbers of vessels into the Territory, further boosting the economy and leveraging the Territory’s charter facilities. It also placed the USVI top-of-mind as an overall marine destination.

To further develop marine tourism, he said the Department of Tourism engaged with agencies ranging from the Office of the Governor, through the Department of Health, the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority, the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and the private sector, to engage and leverage the tourism’s online platforms to increase awareness. The web page www.usviupdate.com/marine provides an overview of the territory’s assets and resources for the marine industry.

From hosting the annual Paradise Jam basketball tournament to leveraging the USVI Soccer Federation’s FIFA-certified soccer field on St. Croix, and hosting the ITF junior tennis tournament, Mr. Boschulte stated that the Department of Tourism will continue to invite members of the media to attend and participate in events such as the USVI Charter Yacht Show, the St. Thomas International Regatta, Carlos Aguilar Match Race, Beauty and the Beast Triathlon, Beach to Beach Power Swim, and the USVI Tennis Cup.

“These media visits have resulted in positive coverage and exposure for the Territory’s sport tourism offerings and capabilities,” he said, and the department will also help to promote emerging sporting events such as volleyball, horse racing, cricket, car and drone racing.

Tourism department advances, said Mr. Boschulte, will be based on an ongoing collaborative and cooperative partnership with the Department of Health to uphold and strengthen the territory’s COVID-19 protocols.

