

The Virgin Islands Consortium

The U.S. Virgin Islands recognized as destination of the year by the Caribbean Journal

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The U.S. Virgin Islands was declared destination of the year by the Caribbean Journal (C.J.) in the 7th annual edition of their Caribbean Travel Awards. With moderately low numbers of coronavirus cases and vastly tourism-reliant economies, many Caribbean islands, including the USVI, began welcoming back international tourists for nonessential travel to their islands.

While the USVI was the first Caribbean destination to reopen its borders for tourism on June 1 since the onset of the pandemic, the territory has had to close its borders on two separate occasions to leisure visitors for at least a month in order to curve the spread of coronavirus.

In mid-August, Governor Albert Bryan reinstated the stay-at-home order after a surge in coronavirus cases in the territory. The Governor decided to close back the territory airports to leisure travelers for 30 more days and barred hotel, Air BnB's, and other accommodation providers from checking in guests. At that time, the Governor stated, "The challenge is to achieve a balance between getting the economy up and running while keeping our visitors and our residents safe and healthy." However, on September 19, after the Governor saw a decline in cases, he officially reopened the territory for leisure travel once again. The first week of the return of leisure travel to the territory was deemed "extraordinarily successful," as V.I. Department of Tourism representatives stated. After reopening for the second time, the USVI instilled test and health screening requirements for tourists and locals alike.

For example, in order to enter the territory, all travelers five years and older are required to submit proof of a negative COVID-19 antigen (molecular/PCR/rapid) test has been taken five days prior to arrival. Travelers who are unable to produce a negative test result will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days at their own expense.

The C.J. said, "even in a year of impossibilities, the Caribbean is back, navigating its way through the challenges of the new age of travel, an essential task for the most tourism-dependent regional economy in the world." According to the Journal, the USVI, in many ways, helped pave the path for the broader reopening for the entire Caribbean. "he USVI has been a model for tourism reopening's around the region," said the C.J. The Journal added that the Caribbean has largely set a global example for how to reopen in a careful, focused, safe manner — providing its signature sanctuary for travelers and a vital injection of economic energy.