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Dept. of Tourism Says Visitor Demand for USVI is Strong Even as Neighbors Struggle

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Overlook of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Dept. of Tourism is crediting smart, sensible public health policies and tourism management efforts for the admirable performance of the territory's bread-and-butter industry during the Covid-19 pandemic.

D.O.T. Commissioner Joseph Boschulte reported that in an environment of deep declines in regional and international tourism arrivals, the U.S. Virgin Islands has weathered the pandemic storm well, despite restricting leisure travel twice last year, from March through June, and then again in August and September.

According to D.O.T., as the Caribbean Tourism Organization reports a 2020 Caribbean-wide stayover visitor decline of 65.5 percent, down from a record 31.5 million stayover visits to the

region in 2019, the U.S. Virgin Islands welcomed 415,749 air arrivals in 2020, representing a 35.1 percent reduction year-over-year. Global tourism declined 73.9 percent over the same period.

“We are incredibly thankful for the leadership of Governor Albert Bryan Jr, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, Commissioner of Health Justa Encarnacion and the countless Virgin Islanders – from our policy makers and the business community to grassroots organizers – for their thoughtful actions, which continue to protect precious lives as well as livelihoods,” said Mr. Boschulte.

[STR](#) data show a 29.1 percent year-over-year (2020 vs. 2019) decline in the USVI hotel occupancy rate, compared to a 52.5 percentage drop in the region. Average Daily Rates (ADR) in the USVI climbed by 43.3 percent compared with a 2.4 percentage increase across the Caribbean.

“We must continue to press on and deliver results for our industry and for every Virgin Islander,” the tourism commissioner stated. “But not at the expense of relaxing adherence to public health and safety protocols such as wearing face masks and maintaining physical distance.”

Buoyed by a major uptick in airlift to the territory, which started over the Thanksgiving period and is being sustained over the ensuing months, Mr. Boschulte reported the tourism recovery has been strong with the territory experiencing an encouraging start to 2021, anchored by robust visitor arrivals throughout the current Spring break period, D.O.T. said.

In spite of the positive outlook, the commissioner said the Department of Tourism will continue to strengthen relationships with industry partners to help position the territory as a preferred visitor destination in the Caribbean.

“While we are pleased with our performance to date, we recognize that we have our work cut out for us,” said Mr. Boschulte, who reported that he and his team would meet with U.S. Virgin Islanders in the Diaspora along with the department’s sales and marketing representatives during the upcoming weeks and fine-tune its marketing strategy in light of the changing nature of the pandemic and its impact on the economy.

The U.S. Virgin Islands recently announced that it will allow all U.S. Virgin Islands residents ages 16 or older to receive the Covid-19 vaccine, making it the first United States jurisdiction to offer the vaccine to such a large majority of residents. Alaska followed suit shortly after, as the first U.S. state to permit residents ages 16 or older to receive the Covid-19 vaccine.

With at least 20,000 people in the territory having received at least the first dose of the Covid-19 vaccine according to the V.I. Dept. of Health, the USVI is on pace to meet Governor Bryan's goal of having half the population, or 50,000 people vaccinated by July 1, 2021.