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Big Moves: Dept. of Tourism Brings a Taste of Carnival to One of America's Largest Festivals in Well-Executed Marketing Strategy

Experience the USVI / **Published On September 07, 2021 08:43 AM /**

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Made in America participants interact with Moko Jumbie at USVI sponsor booth on Sunday, Sept. 5 2021 By. VI CONSORTIUM

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA — The V.I. Department of Tourism has seized on a unique opportunity that has allowed it to build on the territory's mindshare among mainland Americans, as many Caribbean destinations remain off limits as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and as Americans seek vacation destinations closer to home.

Over the Labor Day Weekend (Sept. 4-5), the department was in Philadelphia to participate as a main sponsor in the popular Made in America festival, an event started in 2012 by American

rapper, record producer and business mogul Jay-Z, as a way to bring together music and culture.

The Saturday and Sunday concerts boasted names such as Justin Bieber, Doja Cat and Megan the Stallion, among others.

The Labor Day Weekend event was the first since the pandemic, and like its predecessors, it attracted tens of thousands of people from around the country and was well suited to promote the U.S. Virgin Islands — especially to overnight visitors, a category Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte told the Consortium has seen tremendous growth during the pandemic.

The department had over 20 people on location to execute the mission, and execute they did: About 25,000 promotional items were distributed in a span of two days by tourism reps. The department's large booth was located as soon as you entered the festival park, a placement that gave it access to nearly everyone in attendance.

Caribbean Soca music from the USVI and other Caribbean islands were on rotation on two speakers blasting as attendees passed by. Some attendees would dance as they came through; a large portion of them stopped and engaged with Tourism-hired USVI dancers; and some used their phones to scan a USVI QR code for a chance to win a trip to the territory.

D.O.T. put a respectable marketing campaign in place by all accounts, including the presence of Moko Jumbies, which captivated event attendees as they passed by — some taking photos with the jumbies, others a little startled by them and yet more dancing with and going through their stilts with friends.

But perhaps the most effective marketing tool were the ads the department had on screens placed on the two main performance stages, where thousands of eventgoers gathered to enjoy the entertainment. There were times during changing of bands where thousands of people stood in wait, many of them seeing at least three USVI ads looping with other major U.S. brands.

"We're around companies such as DHL, Burger King and Clorox, and little ole Virgin Islands is here making an impact so that's what it's all about," said Ian Turnbull, USVI Division of Festivals director.

Alani Henneman-Todman, D.O.T. assistant commissioner, spoke of the importance to continue marketing the USVI even in the midst of the pandemic, noting that competitors would not sit idle. "When we were given the opportunity to partner with Made in America, we knew it would be a great success for the destination," she said. "The result of our Moko Jumbies and infusion of our culture and being the first title Travel Sponsor for this event has bolstered us and given us another level of recognition to the young and old."

What's Next for D.O.T., according to Ms. Henneman-Todman

"The future is bright despite the times, but we have to make sure we evolve with the pandemic. We have to stay on top of our health protocols and follow the governor's mandates and be able to be open for business," Ms. Henneman-Todman said. "This is critical for us to stay ahead of the curve, to increase our overnight guests to the territory, and find a balance with the cruise ship lines to return successfully to our destination."