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New Findings Cement USVI as Caribbean Destination Which Rebounded Most Since Covid-19

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Jetblue Airlines, American Airlines, and Spirit Airlines at the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas on March 20, 2023. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

Data collated by leading travel publication Travel Pulse has reinforced the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as the Caribbean destination that has rebounded the most since the Covid-19 pandemic.

The numbers show that the territory has not just rebounded but is surpassing pre-pandemic performance in the tourism sector. In the first half of 2023, the USVI reportedly welcomed 23 percent more international visitors than it did for the corresponding period in 2019, according to statistics presented by Travel Pulse.

While other destinations in the region are also surpassing their 2019 arrival figures, only the USVI is ahead by more than 20 percentage points. The territory's strong position during the pandemic, developing a travel portal and re-opening its borders while many of its neighbors were still closed for business, has served as a springboard for growth in arrival numbers. In fact, the USVI's strategy for pandemic-era travel earned it the "Destination of the Year" [award](#) in 2020 from Caribbean Journal, a leading travel news publication.

The territory has been enjoying record tourist arrivals for [some time now](#). The first quarter of 2022 had 153 percent more visitor arrivals compared to the same period in 2021. According to Department of Tourism Commissioner Joseph Boschulte, over 450,000 people traveled to the USVI in the first three months of last year.

The tourism boom is impacting both stayover and cruise numbers, which had remained subdued post-pandemic, even after stayover visitors had come flocking back to USVI shores. November 2022 marked the beginning of a major ratcheting up of cruise ship arrivals, in part based on a decision by Royal Caribbean to [significantly increase port calls](#) to both St. Thomas and St. Croix. Speaking on the keynote panel of this year's recently concluded Seatrade Cruise Global Conference, Mr. Boschulte said that he expected cruise passenger numbers to reach 2019 levels by the end of 2023.

Mr. Boschulte says the sector's robust performance is evidence that the marketing strategy [unveiled in 2019](#) is working. "As the Tourism Department and the USVI move into our next evolution of tourism, we believe it's most important to highlight our people, our culture, our food, and our history, and there's no better voice than our own people," the commissioner said that year, at an event to mark the launch of the new marketing push.

Now, he says the numbers speak for themselves. "Our two taglines, "Naturally in Rhythm" and "St. Croix: A Vibe Like No Other", highlights our culture, our food, our beaches and most importantly our people. Our campaigns are trending well; the results are proof."

The tourism commissioner says now is not the time to ease up on the throttle, however. "USVI Tourism continues to actively engage with our airline and cruise partners to protect and grow our lift into the territory," said Mr. Boschulte. "Additionally, we aggressively promote the territory in cities and towns across the U.S., Canada and Europe."

Mr. Boschulte says he looks forward to key hotel projects in the territory coming online in the short and medium term to absorb the increased demand that is being created by the influx of arrivals. "Our future is bright," he declared.