

VI Government To Create A National Tourism Policy

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The just concluded inaugural Tourism Summit has laid the groundwork for the creation of a National Policy, to steer the development of the Tourism sector over the coming years.

Coming out of conference held at Peter Island on January 16 and 17, it was disclosed that extensive public consultations will be ongoing to ensure the voices of all stakeholders are included in the process to have the National Tourism Policy and Plan finalised by June 2025.

Premier and Minister of Finance Honourable Dr. Natalio Wheatley underscored the central role of tourism in the Territory's economy in his keynote address. Premier Wheatley said, "Tourism remains a vital pillar of our economy, providing employment, stimulating business development, and enhancing the standard of living for all. As we strive to sustain this industry, we must do so with a shared vision and collective responsibility."

The summit served as a platform for exploring strategies to advance the tourism sector, with a strong focus on sustainability, cultural integration, and economic empowerment.

Other key initiatives agreed upon include:

- Investing in sustainable practices to protect the Territory's pristine environment.
- Empowering local communities through tourism, including the introduction of the Tourism Investment Programme for Micro Enterprises (TIP ME).
- Enhancing the visitor experience with modern infrastructure, technology, and training.

Junior Minister of Tourism, Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith, highlighted the significance of collaboration, noting that partnerships have long been a driving force behind the Virgin Islands' achievements in various sectors, including financial services.

Honourable Hodge-Smith said, "Tourism is everyone's business. Every resident, whether directly or indirectly involved in the industry, is an ambassador for our

Territory. Each interaction, from the taxi driver to the hotel concierge, contributes to the overall perception of the Virgin Islands as a premier destination."

A highlight of the summit was the celebration of the recovery of the Peter Island Resort, following the devastation caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Permanent Secretary of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, Mr. Joseph Smith, reflected on the summit's significance, stating, "This summit marks the beginning of a significant journey—a journey to shape the future of tourism in the Virgin Islands. Through your participation, feedback, and insights, we will be guided in formulating a comprehensive National Tourism Policy."

The two-day summit brought together more than 330 key stakeholders, tourism experts, and industry leaders, fostering productive discussions on how to shape a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive tourism industry for the future.

The event reinforced the idea that tourism is not just a business but a shared responsibility, crucial to the Virgin Islands' economic prosperity. The momentum generated during the event is expected to guide the creation of a stronger, more sustainable tourism sector that benefits all residents.

The Ministry of Tourism of the Virgin Islands is dedicated to fostering a sustainable and inclusive tourism sector that contributes to the economic prosperity of the Territory. Through the promotion of responsible tourism, cultural preservation, and innovative solutions, the Ministry aims to enhance the visitor experience while ensuring that the benefits of tourism are shared equitably among all residents.