GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Remarks of the Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture, Hon. Luce Hodge-Smith for the Opening Ceremony of the Tourism Summit, Peter Island

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Protocol having been established, it is my distinct honour and privilege to welcome you all to this year’s Tourism Summit, set amidst the breath-taking beauty of Peter Island.

As someone who has worked in the tourism sector, including my time at the BVI Tourist Board, I understand first-hand the value and impact of tourism on our communities, livelihoods, and overall quality of life. Our tourism journey has been shaped by visionary decisions of the past. The enactment of the Tourism Ordinance, the establishment of iconic properties like Little Dix Bay, and the entrepreneurial spirit of pioneers such as Charles and Ginny Carey, the Christophers and Creques of Tortola, the O'Neals of Virgin Gorda, and the Wheatleys of Anegada have propelled the Virgin Islands to international recognition.

Today, we stand on the shoulders of these giants with a tourism product renowned for its unique blend of luxury, adventure, and natural splendour. Our lush landscapes, pristine beaches, and vibrant marine ecosystems remain our greatest assets. Our duty is to safeguard these treasures through ongoing environmental conservation efforts and ensure that our communities remain clean and welcoming.

However, sustaining our tourism industry requires more than preservation; it demands innovation, capacity-building, and reimagining how we deliver exceptional experiences. We must:

· Build the capacity of our people through education and training, ensuring that they are equipped to meet the demands of a dynamic global tourism market.

· Embrace innovative ideas and modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, to enhance operational efficiency and visitor satisfaction.

· Re-imagine tourism by exploring new niches, improving accessibility, and creating inclusive opportunities for all.

· Elevate our customer service standards, recognising that each interaction is an opportunity to create lasting memories for our guests.

I warmly welcome our esteemed presenters, whose knowledge and insights will undoubtedly inspire meaningful discussions over the next two days. To our attendees, thank you for being part of this important gathering. Your presence here signifies your commitment to the future of tourism in the Virgin Islands.

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.

The economic significance of tourism cannot be overstated. It is a vital pillar of our economy, providing employment, stimulating business development, and enhancing our standard of living. As we strive to sustain this industry, we must do so with a shared vision and collective responsibility.

Over the next two days, I encourage you to engage actively in the discussions, share your ideas, and provide feedback. This summit is an opportunity to chart a sustainable path forward for tourism in the Virgin Islands. Let us work together to ensure the continued growth and success of our industry.

In closing, I wish each of you a productive and inspiring summit. May the insights gained and connections made here today drive us towards a brighter future for tourism in our beautiful Territory.

Thank you.