GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Premier Says Tourism Sector Holds Greatest Potential for Growth in The Virgin Islands

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Premier and Minister of Finance and Tourism Honourable Dr. Natalio D. Wheatley has highlighted that tourism offers the greatest potential for growth in The Virgin Islands and the Government will continue efforts to expand and diversify the tourism product.

Premier Wheatley was addressing the opening of the two-day Virgin Islands Tourism Summit 2026 on 10th June at Peter Island Resort.

The Premier said tourism has the most growth potential and stated that The Virgin Islands has made steady progress in rebuilding and growing its tourism industry following the impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Premier reported that the Territory welcomed more than 300,000 overnight visitors during each of the last two years and noted that overnight arrivals were up approximately six percent during the first quarter of 2026 when compared with the same period last year.

Addressing the issue of overnight visitor growth, Honourable Wheatley said increasing hotel accommodation remains critical to the Territory’s tourism development goals. He said, “The challenge before us is to build more hotels….You cannot expect to have high overnight visitor numbers if you don't have the infrastructure to be able to support (that).”

The Premier announced that the Government is preparing to issue a Request for Proposals for Prospect Reef and said the project is expected to result in a high-quality hotel development on Tortola.

He also highlighted several developments that are expected to contribute to growth in overnight visitor arrivals, including a proposed development at West End, continued expansion at Leverick Bay, ongoing development at Bitter End and Oil Nut Bay, and development planned for Long Bay.

Premier Wheatley also pointed to the importance of expanding air access to the Territory and welcomed ongoing efforts to extend the runway at the Terrance B. Lettsome International Airport, describing it as an important component in increasing overnight visitor arrivals and expanding market access.

The Premier stressed the importance of maintaining balance between the overnight and cruise tourism sectors, noting that both contribute significantly to The Virgin Islands' economy and provide opportunities for residents.

He said the Government is also pursuing initiatives aimed at distributing visitor activity across more locations in the Territory, including the development of Brandywine Bay as a tourist attraction.

The Premier further highlighted opportunities to diversify the tourism sector through cultural and heritage tourism, entertainment tourism and sports tourism. He said, "We have a wonderful sailing industry. We have a wonderful luxury industry. We have an excellent product here in The Virgin Islands, but we can create more opportunities."

The Premier also noted that a new tourism policy, developed through stakeholder consultations and informed by discussions held during the first Tourism Summit and industry meetings, is nearing completion.

The opening ceremony also featured remarks from Junior Minister for Tourism and Culture Honourable Luce Hodge-Smith and tourism industry officials.

The Virgin Islands Tourism Summit 2026 brings together tourism stakeholders, government officials, industry professionals and international guests to discuss issues affecting the tourism sector and opportunities for future growth. The theme is: "Shaping the Future of Tourism in The Virgin Islands: Partnership, Investment & Direction."

Over the two days, participants will examine topics including sustainable tourism challenges, tourism resilience, disaster preparedness and recovery, cruise tourism sustainability, national tourism policy, market access, global competitiveness, digital growth, entertainment tourism, traveller demand trends and the future direction of tourism in The Virgin Islands.

The event is being hosted through a partnership between the Ministry, the British Virgin Islands Tourist Board and Film Commission, and the BVI Yachting Hotel & Tourism Association.

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About:

The Government of the Virgin Islands is committed to promoting good governance and the sustainable development of the Territory with a view to ensuring a well-informed, prosperous, cohesive and stable society. The Premier’s Office serves as the focal point for coordinating cross-sectoral policies and programmes and advancing the Territory’s development priorities in support of that vision.

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