

Executive Summary

Good morning, Finance Committee Chair, Honorable Senator Novelle E. Francis, Committee Members, and Senators of the 36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands, legislative staff, members of the media, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Jennifer Matarangas-King, U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism Commissioner. Pursuant to your invitation, I am here today to present the Department of Tourism's budget testimony for Fiscal Year 2026. Today, I am accompanied by Assistant Commissioner of Marketing and Communications Alani Henneman, Deputy Commissioner Shamari Haynes, Chief Financial Officer Kenneth Milligan, and Director of Festivals Ian Turnbull.

As a destination, the U.S. Virgin Islands remains a preeminent choice for travelers seeking an authentic Caribbean experience. In alignment with the Department of Tourism's statutory mandate to promote the Territory, increase visitor arrivals, and strengthen the tourism economy, we continue to expand our global brand presence through innovative marketing and communications initiatives that showcase our vibrant culture, rich heritage, and unmatched accessibility, underscored by our signature message: "No Passport Required."

As Commissioner of Tourism, I am proud of the Department's continued progress and momentum. Collectively, our team, including our on-island and offshore staff, alongside our marketing, communications, and public relations agency partners, continues to execute with creativity, strategic vision, and strong industry relationships. Through bold campaigns, thoughtful partnerships, and an understanding of our key audiences, we continue to position the U.S. Virgin Islands at the forefront of travel conversations among the diaspora, prospective visitors, and returning guests.

This year, the Department continued to strengthen relationships within the tourism industry through participation in leading trade shows, conferences, and marketing events that support destination awareness, business development, and strategic partnerships.

The Department also maintained active memberships and partnerships with key industry organizations, including the Caribbean Tourism Organization, Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, U.S. Travel Association, and Destinations International. These relationships remain essential in ensuring the U.S. Virgin Islands maintains a strong voice and presence within the global tourism community.

While the global airline industry continues to experience significant shifts, airlift into both St. Thomas and St. Croix continues to show resilience and growth. The Territory secured several important connectivity wins, including the launch of Southwest Airlines' daily nonstop service from Baltimore/Washington and Orlando to St. Thomas in late 2025.

This continued focus on connectivity and visitor support contributed to record-breaking arrival performance. March 2026 delivered strong results, with 121,716 total arrivals, representing a 23 percent increase year-over-year and 14 percent above the previous high set in 2024. St. Thomas led this growth with 98,284 arrivals, up 24 percent compared to 2025, while St. Croix welcomed 23,432 arrivals, reflecting a 20 percent year-over-year increase.

Following the announcement of Spirit Airlines' operational disruption in May 2026, the Department responded quickly by launching the Stranded Passenger Program to provide assistance and support to visitors impacted while traveling in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through this proactive outreach effort, the Department assisted hundreds of visitors during an unprecedented disruption, reinforcing our commitment to visitor care beyond the traditional marketing role.

Building on this momentum, the first quarter of 2026 recorded 303,388 arrivals, representing a 12 percent increase year-over-year and a 6 percent increase compared to 2024. Through June 2026, St. Thomas welcomed 464,289 visitor arrivals, while St. Croix recorded 108,604 arrivals, keeping the Territory on pace to match or exceed 2025 performance, with year-end projections estimating more than 900,000 arrivals.

Looking ahead to the remainder of the 2026/2027 travel season, we are excited for the launch of additional air service opportunities, including Fly the Whale daily service between Puerto Rico and St. Thomas, United Airlines' forthcoming Newark, New Jersey service to St. Croix and Breeze Airways' daily service from Tampa to St. Thomas.

Just as important as connectivity from the mainland United States is our increased interconnectivity throughout the Caribbean. The forthcoming launch of direct daily service between St. Thomas and St. Maarten through Contour Airlines will further enhance regional accessibility and complement existing service to destinations including the Dominican Republic, Anguilla, St. Kitts, St. Barthélemy, and Nevis.

This continued growth in airlift directly supports the expansion and enhancement of the Territory's accommodations sector. Ongoing development, renovations, and new accommodations continue to strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' competitive position throughout the Caribbean. By the end of Fiscal Year 2027, we anticipate additional properties coming online, including The Botany at Botany Bay in St. Thomas, featuring 20 luxury villas and suites, and Club Med St. Croix, which recently celebrated its first stone event marking a \$75 million redevelopment of the Carambola property expected to include approximately 150 rooms and suites.

The Hampton by Hilton at Havensight Dock welcomed guests this year, bringing the Hilton brand back to the Virgin Islands after more than five decades and adding 126 guestrooms to our inventory. The property also strengthens our meetings and conference offerings, and expanding opportunities within the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) market currently anchored by the Westin, St. Thomas Beach Resort and Spa, The Buccaneer Resort and the Ritz-Carlton, St. Thomas.

Year to date through May, the Territory's hotel occupancy rate reached 73.8 percent, representing a 7.5 percent increase year-over-year. Revenue per available room (RevPAR) totaled \$415, outperforming the regional average of \$302, while the U.S. Virgin Islands continued to lead the Caribbean in marketing-assisted average daily rate (ADR), reaching \$515, an increase of 6.4 percent over 2025. The vacation rental market also continued to demonstrate strength, with Airbnb and VRBO occupancy reaching 68 percent and average daily rates increasing to \$455.37.

This strong lodging performance is reflected in hotel tax collections, which support the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund. Through June 2026, hotel tax revenues totaled \$47.8 million, representing a 25.6 percent increase compared with the same period in 2025. Based on current trends, the Territory is on pace to surpass the record-setting \$52.8 million collected last fiscal year.

While arrivals and land development continue to thrive, visitation by sea remains a significant contributor to the Territory's tourism economy, bringing a steady flow of visitors through St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. The global cruise industry continues to be one of the strongest-performing sectors of international travel, and the U.S. Virgin Islands remains well positioned to capitalize on that growth.

Through June 2026, the Territory welcomed **1,265,527 cruise passengers**, representing a **40.2 percent increase** over the **902,881 passengers** recorded during the same period in 2025. St. Thomas continues to drive this exceptional performance, welcoming **1,133,028 cruise passengers**, a **47.1 percent increase** over the **770,474 passengers** received through June 2025. St. Croix also maintained steady visitation, welcoming **132,499 cruise passengers**, consistent with the **132,407 passengers** recorded during the same period last year. **Beyond strong visitation growth, cruise tourism continues to generate meaningful economic impact, with cruise passengers spending an average of \$167 per day while in the U.S. Virgin Islands—the second-highest average daily cruise passenger expenditure in the Caribbean.** This spending directly supports local businesses, restaurants, retailers, tour operators, transportation providers, and cultural attractions across the Territory.

This year, the Territory welcomed two new cruise partners to St. Thomas' itinerary lineup: **Margaritaville at Sea and Virgin Voyages**. These additions further strengthen the Territory's position as a premier Caribbean cruise destination and demonstrate continued confidence from cruise industry partners.

Cruise tourism remains a critical driver of the Territory's economy, supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and generating meaningful tax revenue. As visitor preferences continue to evolve, the Department remains committed to working with local stakeholders to expand authentic cultural, culinary, retail, and experiential offerings that encourage greater visitor spending while showcasing the distinct character of each island.

The continued growth of tourism across the Territory reflects our strategic and intentional coordination of public relations, advertising, partnerships, and digital engagement efforts designed to enhance the national and global profile of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through proactive media outreach, targeted marketing campaigns, ambassador partnerships, paid media placements, social storytelling, and precision digital advertising, the Department continues to inspire travel demand while strengthening relationships with prospective visitors and returning guests.

Our marketing strategy continues to evolve beyond traditional destination promotion by creating meaningful connections through sports, entertainment, lifestyle, culture, and culinary experiences. These efforts allow us to showcase not only the beauty of the Territory, but the

people, traditions, and experiences that make the U.S. Virgin Islands a truly distinctive destination.

The Department continues to strengthen its destination marketing strategy through strategic sports, entertainment, lifestyle partnerships, and targeted market initiatives that elevate the U.S. Virgin Islands' presence among priority audiences. These collaborations position the Territory alongside premier brands and marquee events while creating opportunities to engage prospective travelers through authentic storytelling and integrated marketing activations.

Partnerships with the **New York Jets, New York Mets, Chicago Cubs, Boston Red Sox, and the LPGA** have expanded the Territory's reach among highly engaged audiences while reinforcing the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination for travel, sports, and lifestyle experiences. **These strategic partnerships, particularly within priority feeder markets such as Boston, have helped strengthen destination awareness and support increased travel demand. Boston has experienced significant growth, with year-to-date arrivals reaching 32,444 visitors, representing a 64.9 percent increase year-over-year, demonstrating the continued value of targeted market engagement and increased connectivity.**

These efforts are further strengthened by expanded air connectivity, which continues to improve access from key markets providing additional opportunities to reach travelers in high-value markets and convert destination awareness into visitation.

Participation in premier entertainment and lifestyle platforms, including **One Music Fest, the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, and the Roc Nation Super Bowl event**, continues to expand the U.S. Virgin Islands' visibility among priority audiences. These strategic activations allow the Department to showcase the Territory's culture, cuisine, music, and hospitality while building deeper connections with engaged travelers.

Our partnership with iHeartMedia and Angela Yee's "Way Up With Angela Yee" brought additional national visibility to St. Thomas Carnival through a live broadcast from the Territory, highlighting our culture, celebrations, and hospitality to more than 4 million listeners across the country. Strategic familiarization trips featuring influential personalities and entertainers, including Naturi Naughton, Maino, Donnell Rawlings, Cassie Yeung, and others, further amplified the destination story, generating more than **1,200 Instagram and TikTok posts, 662,300 engagements, 12.4 million impressions and reach, and an estimated \$18.9 million in earned media value.** Complementing these efforts, traditional journalists continue to generate high-impact editorial coverage and feature stories that showcase the depth of the destination, including placements in leading outlets such as Travel + Leisure, Travel Noire, Condé Nast Traveler, and others.

These initiatives demonstrate the power of strategic partnerships in positioning the U.S. Virgin Islands not simply as a place to visit, but as a destination to experience, celebrate, and return to.

The Department's sports and lifestyle marketing strategy extends beyond external activations by also promoting the Territory as a premier destination for sporting events. The U.S. Virgin Islands

continues to host internationally recognized events, including the St. Thomas International Regatta (STIR), YES Tournament, 8 Tuff Miles, and the Paradise Jam collegiate basketball tournament. Broadcast nationally across ESPN, ESPN2, and ESPN+, Paradise Jam provides valuable exposure for the destination, reaching more than 70 million U.S. households and positioning the Territory as a premier location for sports tourism, competition, and unforgettable visitor experiences. **Looking ahead to Fiscal Year 2027, the Department will continue to expand the Territory's appeal as a leading sports tourism destination by welcoming internationally recognized events, including the 2026 Sunfish World Championship and the Clipper 2027–28 Around the World Yacht Race, further elevating the U.S. Virgin Islands' profile on the global stage.**

Industry engagement remains a critical component of the Department's strategy to strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' position within the global travel and tourism marketplace. Through participation in leading industry events, including **Routes World, Routes Americas, Seatrade Cruise Global, IMEX America, Caribbean Travel Marketplace, National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD), Virtuoso, Destinations International, Travel & Adventure and International Pow Wow (IPW)**, the Department continues to cultivate essential B2B relationships with airline partners, cruise lines, meeting planners, travel advisors, and tourism stakeholders that support visitation growth and economic development.

At these global platforms, the Department showcases the authentic spirit of the U.S. Virgin Islands by incorporating cultural elements such as Mocko Jumbies, traditional dancers, and locally crafted products, providing industry partners with a firsthand connection to the people, heritage, and experiences that distinguish the Territory. Collaboration with local stakeholders, including members of the Legislature, cruise and port partners, the Virgin Islands Port Authority, and hospitality industry representatives, further strengthens the Territory's collective presence and impact at key industry engagements.

Beyond major trade and industry events, the Department's Offshore Sales Team continues to drive destination awareness and conversion by building long-term relationships with travel advisors, meeting planners, and tourism professionals throughout key mainland U.S. and international markets. These efforts remain essential to expanding market reach, supporting travel demand, and reinforcing the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination.

The U.S. Virgin Islands' festivals remain a powerful expression of the Territory's culture, heritage, and community pride while serving as significant economic drivers for residents, local businesses, artists, and entrepreneurs. Through strategic planning, community partnerships, and targeted promotion, the Division of Festivals continues to elevate signature celebrations across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John while ensuring tourism dollars are reinvested directly into Virgin Islands communities.

Between 2024 and 2026, festival expenditures maintained an approximate **3-to-1 ratio of local versus international payouts**, resulting in an estimated **\$8.5 million investment in Virgin Islands artists, entertainers, vendors, and service providers**. In Fiscal Year 2026 alone, more than **\$3.2 million was paid directly to local participants**, reinforcing the Department's

commitment to maximizing the economic benefits of tourism and ensuring that festival investments directly support the Territory's communities. **Overall, festival-related expenditures of \$6.5 million generated an estimated \$234.4 million in economic impact, representing a 3,607 percent return on investment and demonstrating the significant role festivals play in driving visitor spending, supporting local businesses, and creating economic opportunities for Virgin Islanders.**

Beyond direct festival participation, the Department continues to expand opportunities for local entrepreneurs through initiatives such as the **Festival Microloan Program**, which provided **\$149,515 in financing to 11 small businesses** during the 2025–2026 festival season. These investments allow local vendors and entrepreneurs to expand their operations, participate more fully in signature celebrations, and benefit from the economic opportunities created through tourism.

The Division also enhanced the visitor experience through expanded entertainment programming featuring internationally recognized performers alongside Virgin Islands talent, including **Pumpa, Adam O, Kes the Band, Pressure Busspipe, Machel Montano, Morgan Heritage, Busta Rhymes, Ashanti, Romain Virgo, Ala Jaza, and Baby Cham**. By pairing world-class entertainment with authentic Virgin Islands culture, celebrations such as the **Crucian Christmas Festival, St. Thomas Carnival, and St. John Celebration** continue to attract residents, returning Virgin Islanders, and visitors while strengthening the Territory's reputation as a premier destination for festivals and cultural tourism.

These celebrations remain rooted in community, heritage, and local economic opportunity, showcasing the traditions and experiences that make each island unique.

The strength of the U.S. Virgin Islands tourism industry is rooted in the connection between visitors, residents, local businesses, and the communities that bring the destination to life. **Through the power of local connectivity, residents and members of the Virgin Islands diaspora continue to serve as ambassadors for the Territory, helping attract notable group travel opportunities, including gatherings of the Divine 9, professional associations, and other affinity organizations that bring visitors, economic activity, and meaningful connections back to the islands.**

Through strategic communications, educational initiatives, and workforce development programs, the Territory continues to foster greater awareness of tourism's economic and cultural importance while creating opportunities for Virgin Islanders to actively participate in the industry's growth.

Through traditional media, digital storytelling, newsletters, and territory-wide outreach efforts, residents and stakeholders remain informed about tourism initiatives, destination enhancements, emergency preparedness, festivals, and the continued impact of the visitor economy. Both the airline-focused and locally centered deskside newsletters, whose click-through rates continue to outperform industry standards, provide two important target audiences with timely and relevant updates. These efforts ensure tourism remains a shared conversation and reinforce the critical role residents play in shaping the Territory's visitor experience.

A key component of this work is investing in the next generation of Virgin Islands tourism ambassadors. Through initiatives such as **Tourism Speaks**, youth internship programs, and educational partnerships, students are introduced to hospitality careers, customer service excellence, and the importance of preserving the culture and traditions that define the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Through Visitor Experience internships, students gained hands-on experience supporting visitor services and destination engagement while developing valuable workforce skills. Across the Territory, the program supported **11 interns on St. Croix** and **five intern greeters across St. Thomas and St. John**, creating meaningful pathways for youth interested in careers within tourism and hospitality. Interns also extended their impact through community service initiatives, including supporting the Boys & Girls Club Summer Program and participating in a Day of Giving benefiting residents of Genip Gardens in Frederiksted.

By investing in residents as ambassadors, storytellers, and future industry leaders, the Territory continues to strengthen the relationship between tourism and community prosperity. Through the fulfillment of more than **2,000 local collateral requests** and the allocation of **\$750,000 toward community events and activations**, the Department continues to ensure residents, organizations, and local partners have the resources needed to share the story of the U.S. Virgin Islands. These initiatives ensure tourism growth remains inclusive, culturally grounded, and reflective of the people and traditions that make the U.S. Virgin Islands a truly unique destination.

As we look toward Fiscal Year 2027, the Department remains focused on strengthening the foundation that has allowed the U.S. Virgin Islands to achieve record-breaking performance while preparing for continued growth. Our priorities remain clear: expanding airlift and cruise partnerships, enhancing the visitor experience, supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs, investing in our workforce, and ensuring tourism remains a sustainable economic engine for all Virgin Islanders.

The success we have experienced is a direct reflection of the collaboration between our residents, hospitality partners, government stakeholders, industry partners, and the dedicated team at the Department of Tourism. Together, we will continue to tell the story of the U.S. Virgin Islands, welcome visitors from around the world, and ensure that the benefits of tourism continue to reach every corner of our Territory.

FY2027 Budget Recommendation

The Department respectfully requests an appropriation of **\$ 39,000,000.00** for Fiscal Year 2027, which remains substantially consistent with the Department's Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation. This funding level will allow the Department to maintain current operations while continuing to execute its core mission of promoting the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination and advancing tourism as the Territory's leading economic driver.

The Department of Tourism's **FY 2026 recommended budget totals \$39,035,000**, including **\$2,602,727 for personnel, \$1,134,774 for fringe benefits, \$522,000 for supplies,**

\$33,530,499 for other operating expenses, \$1,000,000 for the Greeters Program, and \$245,000 for utilities. The recommended budget will support the Department's operational needs, including salaries and fringe benefits, contractual services, office operations, and special division activities such as Offshore Sales, Film, Visitor Experience, and the Division of Festivals, as well as sponsorships, collateral development, public relations, social media, advertising, destination marketing, and strategic promotional initiatives. Compared to **FY 2025 actual expenditures of \$36,340,418.50**, this investment reflects the Department's continued commitment to strengthening the Territory's tourism infrastructure, enhancing the visitor experience, and supporting programs that generate economic opportunities for Virgin Islanders. Through prudent fiscal management and strategic investment, the Department remains committed to maximizing every appropriated dollar while delivering measurable returns through increased visitation, economic impact, and sustainable growth across the Territory.

Appendix A provides a detailed breakdown of the Department's Fiscal Year 2027 budget by expenditure category on pages **XX–XX**.

In closing, I extend my sincere gratitude to Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and Lieutenant Governor Tregenza A. Roach, Esq., for their continued leadership and unwavering support of the Department of Tourism and the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. I also thank the distinguished members of the 36th Legislature for your continued partnership as we work together to strengthen our tourism industry and create lasting economic opportunities for the people of this Territory.

On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I also wish to recognize our many partners whose collaboration is essential to our continued success. Your commitment helps ensure that the U.S. Virgin Islands remains a destination of choice for travelers from around the world.

Finally, I extend my deepest appreciation to the dedicated men and women of the Department of Tourism. Whether serving in our offices, representing the Territory in domestic and international markets, supporting our festivals and events, or welcoming visitors every day, your professionalism, adaptability, and commitment have been the foundation of our success. In an increasingly complex travel environment marked by challenges such as airspace disruptions, airline industry instability, extreme weather events, and potential government disruptions affecting critical travel operations like TSA and Customs processing, your ability to respond with resilience and deliver exceptional service has ensured the U.S. Virgin Islands remains a trusted and welcoming destination.

Special kudos to our Employees of the Year, Nicole George-Petersen, Director of Visitor's Experience and Iyahenna Hiss, Social Media Specialist.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of Tourism's accomplishments and Fiscal Year 2027 budget request. My team and I appreciate your consideration and stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

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- Appropriations Graphics

PENDING

- Addendum

Departmental Operations

Over the past twelve months, the Department of tourism has worked to fill positions across the three districts and offshore teams to facilitate a well-rounded execution of the mandate of marketing the Territory as a premier destination. At present, in-territory representation has increased, specifically in the St. Croix district, with staff participating in a variety of local events and festivities leaning into a more community-driven approach that reiterates the importance of everyone's "Vested Interest" in the success of the tourism industry. Newly added staffers include a Chief Financial Officer (STX), Special Assistant (STX), Communications Specialist (STX), Social Media Specialist (STX), Culture Program Coordinator (STX), and Director of Visitor Experience (STT/STX).

Human Resources

The Human Resources Division continues to support the Department's mission by ensuring the recruitment, retention, and development of a skilled workforce capable of advancing the Territory's tourism priorities. The Division oversees personnel administration, employee relations, payroll coordination, recruitment, policy compliance, and workforce planning while supporting employees across St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, and off-island offices.

The Department currently employs **34 active employees**, including **16 employees on St. Croix, 13 on St. Thomas, 2 on St. John, and 3 serving in off-island offices**. In addition, the Department manages **23 Tourism Greeters** who provide frontline visitor assistance throughout the Territory, including **17 on St. Thomas, 5 on St. Croix, and 1 on St. John**.

The Department's workforce consists of **30 exempt employees, three employees represented by the United Steelworkers (USW), and one GS non-union employee**.

During the fiscal year, the Division managed **one employee separation** and continued to oversee employee relations matters, including **two pending grievance cases**, both of which remain in the process of resolution.

The Department currently has **one vacant position** within the Human Resources Division: **Deputy Director of Human Resources & Payroll**. Filling this position remains a priority to strengthen internal operations and enhance the Division's capacity to support the Department's growing workforce and operational needs.

Visitor Arrivals

The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to experience strong tourism momentum, with visitor arrivals maintaining an upward trajectory through the first half of Fiscal Year 2026. Through June 2026, the Territory welcomed **572,893 air visitors**, representing an **9.7 percent increase** over the 522,035 visitors recorded during the same period in 2025.

St. Thomas led this growth, welcoming **464,289 visitors**, an **increase of 11.1 percent** compared to 417,983 visitors during the same period last year. St. Croix also experienced continued positive performance, receiving **108,604 visitors**, an **increase of 4.4 percent** over the 104,052 visitors recorded in 2025.

These results demonstrate the continued effectiveness of the Department's strategic investments in destination marketing, public relations, air service development, and industry partnerships. Sustained visitor growth strengthens the Territory's tourism economy, supports local businesses and jobs, and reinforces the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as one of the Caribbean's premier destinations

Accommodations

Primary tourism indicators demonstrate continued strength in the Territory's lodging sector, with overnight bookings increasing alongside sustained growth in visitor arrivals. Year to date (May), the Territory's hotel occupancy rate reached 73.8%, representing an increase of 7.5% YOY. Revenue per available room (RevPAR) totaled \$415, outperforming the regional average of \$302, while the U.S. Virgin Islands continued to lead the Caribbean in marketing-assisted average daily rate (ADR), posting \$515 which is up 6.4% over 2025. The vacation rental market also experienced continued growth, with Airbnb and VRBO occupancy reaching 68%, an increase of 7.8% year over year, while average daily rates climbed to \$455.37, representing a 5.2% increase through June.

This strong lodging performance is reflected in hotel tax collections, which fund the Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund (TARF). Through June 2026, hotel tax revenues totaled \$47.8 million, an increase of 25.6% compared with the same period in 2025. Based on current trends, the Territory is on pace to once again surpass the record-setting \$52.8 million collected last fiscal year.

The Territory's continued success is also supported by significant investments in its tourism product across both the traditional lodging sector and the sharing economy. Ongoing hotel development, renovations, and new accommodations are strengthening the U.S. Virgin Islands' competitive position within the Caribbean while providing visitors with a broader range of high-quality experiences.

Last year's opening of the **Hampton by Hilton** on St. Thomas marked the return of the Hilton brand to the Territory, adding **126 guestrooms** and much-needed meeting and conference space. **Lovango Beach Club & Resort** continues to expand its luxury offerings, while the highly anticipated opening of **The Botany at Botany Bay**, expected in Winter 2026, will introduce **20 luxury villas and suites** to the destination.

On St. Croix, the Department recently welcomed the announcement of **Club Med's** return to the U.S. Virgin Islands through a **\$75 million** redevelopment of the former Carambola Beach Resort. This transformational investment is expected to create more than **200 jobs**, add approximately **150 rooms and suites**, and further elevate St. Croix's profile as a premier Caribbean destination while generating lasting economic opportunities for Virgin Islanders.

Airline Strategy

Strategic air service development continues to serve as a cornerstone of the Department of Tourism's efforts to strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' visitor economy and improve connectivity for both residents and travelers. Supported by sustained demand and coordinated airline engagement, the Territory continues to build on its strong tourism performance. Through June 2026, St. Thomas welcomed **464,289 visitor arrivals**, while St. Croix recorded **108,604 arrivals** through June, keeping the destination on pace to match or exceed its 2025 performance, with year-end arrivals projected to reach **915,000**.

The Department's air service strategy combines market intelligence, destination marketing, and direct engagement with airline partners to demonstrate the U.S. Virgin Islands' long-term growth potential. This integrated approach is reinforced through participation in premier aviation forums, targeted cooperative marketing initiatives, and strategic partnerships that support both route development and sustained demand.

Following the **Spirit Airlines disruption in early May 2026**, the Department responded swiftly by launching the **Stranded Passenger Program**, a relief outreach initiative designed to support visitors who were impacted while traveling to or from the U.S. Virgin Islands during the airline's operational changes. The program provided a direct channel for travelers seeking additional assistance and demonstrated the Department's commitment to visitor care, responsiveness, and maintaining a positive destination experience during unforeseen challenges. The initiative received **422 responses**, reflecting the importance of proactive communication and traveler support during periods of disruption.

During **Routes World 2025 in Hong Kong** and **Routes Americas 2026 in Rio de Janeiro**, Department representatives conducted strategic meetings with 12 airline executives and network planners representing **American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines, Sun Country Airlines, United Airlines, Spirit Airlines, Air Canada, WestJet**, and other domestic and international carriers. These discussions highlighted the Territory's strong tourism performance, evolving visitor demand, and opportunities to expand air connectivity.

These efforts translated into continued air service growth, including:

- **Southwest Airlines launching daily nonstop service between Orlando and St. Thomas**

- **Southwest Airlines launching daily nonstop service between Baltimore/Washington and St. Thomas**

Looking ahead, the outlook for the **2027 winter and spring travel season** remains strong despite the departure of Spirit Airlines from the market. Current forecasts project **583,432 available airline seats between January and June 2027**. Based on an anticipated average passenger load factor of **85%**, visitor arrivals are expected to remain resilient and reach **95% of the Territory's record-setting 2026 performance**, underscoring the effectiveness of the Department's ongoing air service development strategy and collaborative partnerships with airline stakeholders.

To maximize awareness and stimulate demand for new and expanded routes, the Department implemented targeted digital marketing campaigns in origin markets, working closely with airline partners to drive bookings and reinforce the U.S. Virgin Islands as an accessible, year-round Caribbean destination.

Current airlines servicing the U.S. Virgin Islands:

- [Cape Air](#)
- [JetBlue](#)
- [American Airlines](#)
- [United Airlines](#)
- [Delta Airlines](#)
- [Sun Country](#)
- [Fly the Whale](#)
- [Southwest Airlines](#)
- Seaborne
- SkyHigh Dominicana
- Forthcoming: Breeze, Contour

Inter Caribbean Airlift

As the Department continues to prioritize stronger regional connectivity, the team has cultivated strategic relationships with airline executives and government leaders across the Caribbean, creating new opportunities to expand air service and strengthen travel between the U.S. Virgin Islands and neighboring destinations. Current routes include:

Cape Air:

- St. Thomas/ St. Kitts
- St. Thomas/ Nevis
- St. Croix/ St. Kitts
- St. Croix/ Nevis
- St. Thomas/ Anguilla
- St. Thomas/ St. Barths

Routes

- Non-stop flights to the US Virgin Islands are available from Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Dallas-Fort Worth, Newark, Orlando, Miami, Washington, DC, Houston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Juan.
- Forthcoming: Tampa, St. Maarten

Building on the Department's air service development efforts, several new routes are anticipated to launch during the Winter 2026 season, further enhancing connectivity to the U.S. Virgin Islands, including:

- Fly The Whale non-stop daily service between Puerto Rico and St. Thomas beginning August 3, 2026
- Contour Air non-stop service between St. Maarten and St. Thomas beginning October 5, 2026
- United Airlines weekly non-stop service between Newark and St. Thomas beginning October 5, 2026
- Breeze Airways non-stop service between Tampa and St. Thomas beginning in December 2026

Cruise Strategy

The global cruise industry continues to be one of the strongest-performing sectors of international travel, and the U.S. Virgin Islands remains well positioned to capitalize on that momentum. Through June 2026, the Territory welcomed **1,265,527 cruise passengers**, representing a **40.2 percent increase** over the **902,881 passengers** recorded during the same period in 2025.

St. Thomas continues to drive the Territory's exceptional cruise performance, welcoming **1,133,028 cruise passengers** through June 2026, a **47.1 percent increase** over the **770,474 passengers** received during the same period last year. St. Croix also maintained steady visitation, welcoming **132,499 cruise passengers**, consistent with the **132,407 passengers** recorded through June 2025.

These results reflect the continued strength of the U.S. Virgin Islands as one of the Caribbean's leading cruise destinations and underscore the effectiveness of the Department's efforts to strengthen relationships with cruise partners while enhancing the visitor experience throughout the Territory. **In addition to growing visitation, the Department continues to improve the efficiency of the cruise arrival experience through strategic partnerships and technological innovation. Select cruise lines have partnered with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to implement Enhanced Passenger Processing (EPP), an advanced biometric screening system that streamlines identity verification and customs processing before passengers reach a CBP officer. This technology significantly expedites passenger processing for both domestic and international cruises and is particularly beneficial when the U.S. Virgin Islands serves as a cruise vessel's first U.S. port of call.**

Cruise tourism remains a critical driver of the Territory's economy, supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and generating meaningful tax revenue. Cruise visitors continue to spend an average of **\$167 per person, per day** in the U.S. Virgin Islands—the **second-highest average daily cruise passenger expenditure in the Caribbean**—creating significant economic benefits for residents and businesses alike.

Looking ahead, the Department is also exploring innovative opportunities to strengthen the Territory's role within the regional cruise industry. In collaboration with several Caribbean destinations and cruise industry partners, the U.S. Virgin Islands is evaluating a satellite homeporting model that would allow a limited number of cruise passengers to begin or end their voyages in the Territory while addressing local accommodation capacity. This regional initiative has the potential to expand homeporting opportunities, increase visitor spending, and generate additional economic activity throughout the Territory.

As cruise demand continues to grow, the Department remains focused on working collaboratively with local stakeholders to expand authentic cultural, culinary, retail, and experiential offerings that encourage greater visitor spending, extend the economic impact of cruise visitation, and showcase the distinct character of St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas.

Cruise Lines that Port in the U.S. Virgin Islands

- Carnival Cruise Line
- Celebrity Cruises
- Disney Cruise Line
- Holland America Line
- Marella Cruises
- Margaritaville at Sea
- MSC Cruises
- Norwegian Cruise Line
- Oceania Cruises
- Princess Cruises
- Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection
- Royal Caribbean International
- Seabourn Cruise Line
- SeaDream Yacht Club
- Silversea Cruises
- Virgin Voyages
- Windstar Cruises

Marine Strategy

Marine tourism continues to serve as a vital pillar of the U.S. Virgin Islands' visitor economy, reinforcing the Territory's reputation as one of the Caribbean's premier destinations for sailing, yachting, boating, fishing, and watersports. From luxury yacht charters and marina stays to

recreational boating and world-class sailing events, the Territory's marine sector attracts high-value visitors while generating significant economic activity for local businesses, captains, marinas, restaurants, retailers, and marine service providers.

Building on the continued growth of the global marine travel market, the Department remains focused on strengthening the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as a leading destination for recreational and luxury marine tourism. The St. Thomas and St. John districts continue to serve as hubs for the international yachting community, supported by premier marinas, yacht clubs, and charter operators that welcome visitors year-round.

Marine sporting events also remain an important driver of visitation and destination awareness. Signature events such as the St. Thomas International Regatta, traditional boat races, and other competitive sailing events attract participants and spectators from around the region and beyond while showcasing the Territory's exceptional sailing conditions and rich maritime heritage. Many of these events are incorporated into the annual cultural celebrations on each island, creating additional opportunities for visitor spending and community engagement.

The Territory's marine meetings and trade events continue to strengthen industry relationships and support long-term growth. The U.S. Virgin Islands Charter Yacht Show, hosted annually by the Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association (VIPCA), has served as the premier showcase for the Territory's charter industry for more than five decades, bringing together charter brokers, yacht crews, and marine professionals from around the world while reinforcing the U.S. Virgin Islands' reputation as a world-class yachting destination.

The Department's continued investment in the U.S. Virgin Islands Charter Yacht Show also delivers measurable returns for the Territory. In partnership with the Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association (VIPCA), the 2026 Charter Yacht Show is projected to generate and influence more than 8,000 hotel room nights, produce approximately \$351,943 in Hotel Tourism Revolving Fund (HTRF) occupancy tax revenue, and generate nearly \$694,000 in direct economic activity across hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, marinas, local vendors, and marine service businesses. Every \$1 invested by the Department is projected to return approximately \$3.91 to the Hotel Tourism Revolving Fund, demonstrating the significant economic value of supporting one of the Territory's premier marine tourism assets.

As demand for experiential and luxury travel continues to grow, the Department will continue working with industry partners to promote marine tourism, expand awareness of the Territory's unique maritime offerings, and strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' competitive position within the global blue economy, and support strategic investments that generate measurable returns for both the Hotel Tourism Revolving Fund and the broader Virgin Islands economy. Through continued collaboration with the marine industry, the Department remains committed to ensuring that this important tourism sector continues to drive visitation, support local businesses, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the Territory's long-term economic prosperity.

Forthcoming to the USVI:

ISCA World Championship (November 7–14, 2026)

The U.S. Virgin Islands will welcome the **2026 ISCA World Championship** to Christiansted, St. Croix, from **November 7–14, 2026**, reinforcing the Territory's reputation as a premier destination for international sailing competition. Held annually since 1970, the championship is one of the sport's most prestigious regattas and will serve as a pre-qualifying event for the **Pan American Games**, attracting many of the world's top sailors. The event is expected to welcome **70 to 100 boats** representing **26 countries**, along with race officials, support crews, families, and spectators. Beyond showcasing St. Croix's exceptional sailing conditions, the championship will generate meaningful economic activity for local hotels, restaurants, transportation providers, retailers, and marine businesses while increasing international visibility for the Territory as a world-class marine tourism destination.

Clipper 2027–28 Around the World Yacht Race

The U.S. Virgin Islands achieved a significant milestone by becoming both a **Host Port** and **Team Partner** for the **Clipper 2027–28 Around the World Yacht Race**, with St. Thomas selected to welcome one of the world's most demanding endurance sailing events. This historic partnership marks the **first time in the race's 30-year history** that the U.S. Virgin Islands will serve as a Host Port and field its own team yacht, while also bringing the Clipper Race back to the Caribbean for the first time in **14 years**.

Throughout the race's **40,000-nautical-mile** global journey spanning more than **11 months** and **13+ international destinations**, a yacht proudly representing the U.S. Virgin Islands will showcase the Territory on the world stage. This partnership elevates the Territory's international profile, strengthens its position as one of the world's premier sailing and maritime destinations, and is expected to generate long-term tourism, media, and economic benefits while inspiring future investment in the Territory's marine sector.

Division of Festivals

The U.S. Virgin Islands' festivals continue to serve as powerful celebrations of culture and heritage while generating meaningful economic opportunities for residents, local businesses, artists, and entrepreneurs. Through strategic planning, community partnerships, and targeted promotion, the Division of Festivals continues to elevate the Territory's signature celebrations while preserving the traditions that define each island. Beyond attracting visitors from around the world, these celebrations provide a direct investment in the local economy, ensuring that tourism dollars are reinvested into Virgin Islands communities.

A key priority has been maximizing local economic impact. Between 2024 and 2026, festival expenditures maintained an approximate **3-to-1 ratio of local versus international payouts**, resulting in an estimated **\$8.5 million invested in Virgin Islands artists, entertainers,**

vendors, and service providers. In Fiscal Year 2026 alone, more than **\$3.2 million was paid directly to local participants**, reinforcing the Department's commitment to ensuring that the economic benefits of festivals remain within the Territory. **These investments have generated substantial returns for the local economy, with festival-related expenditures totaling \$6.5 million and producing an estimated \$234.4 million in economic impact, representing a 3,607 percent return on investment. This return demonstrates the significant economic value of festivals as a catalyst for visitor spending, business activity, employment opportunities, and community prosperity.**

Complementing these investments, the Department continued its partnership to support local entrepreneurs through the **Festival Microloan Initiative** in conjunction with the RTParks Community Impact Fund. During the 2025–2026 festival season, **11 small businesses received financing totaling \$149,515**, including nine businesses on St. Croix and two businesses on St. Thomas, helping vendors expand their operations and participate more fully in the Territory's signature celebrations.

Crucian Christmas Festival – St. Croix

The Crucian Christmas Festival continued to showcase the culture, creativity, and traditions of St. Croix while generating meaningful economic opportunities for local businesses and residents. The festival maintained a strong emphasis on local participation through entertainment, food vendors, artisans, and cultural programming while attracting visitors from throughout the Caribbean and mainland United States.

- **Vendor Revenue:** Food Fair, booth, and pageant revenues totaled **\$71,840**
- **Community Impact Fund:** The program received **15 applications**, awarding grants to **nine community organizations** in support of initiatives that create lasting benefits beyond the festival season.
- **Air Arrivals:** During the festival period, St. Croix welcomed **9,943** air passengers, representing a **3%** increase compared to the previous year.

St. Thomas Carnival

St. Thomas Carnival once again served as one of the territory's premier cultural celebrations, bringing together residents, returning Virgin Islanders, and visitors through music, culture, cuisine, and community. The festival continued to elevate local businesses while attracting national attention through strategic media partnerships and high-profile entertainment.

- **Vendor Revenue:** Food Fair, booth, Calypso competition, and pageant revenues totaled **\$145,610** dollars.

- **Community Impact Fund:** 2 community organizations received grant funding through the Community Impact Fund.
- **Air Arrivals:** During Carnival, St. Thomas welcomed **16,727** air passengers, representing an **8.7%** increase compared to the previous year.

St. John Celebration

The St. John Celebration remained a vibrant reflection of the island's history, culture, and close-knit community, welcoming visitors while honoring the traditions that have long defined the island. The celebration continued to provide valuable opportunities for local businesses, artisans, performers, and food vendors while reinforcing St. John's role within the territory's year-round tourism product.

- **Vendor Revenue:** Food Fair, booth, and pageant revenues totaled **\$32,915 dollars**
- **Community Impact Fund:** No Community Impact Fund grants were awarded during this St. John celebration season.
- **Air Arrivals:** During the celebration period, St. John (via St. Thomas) welcomed **39,799** visitors, representing **8%** compared to the previous year.

World-Class Entertainment, Authentic Virgin Islands Culture

The Division also continued to enhance the visitor experience through an expanded entertainment lineup that featured internationally acclaimed performers alongside local artists, including Morgan Heritage, Busta Rhymes, Ashanti, Romain Virgo, Ala Jaza, Baby Cham, and others. By pairing world-class entertainment with authentic Virgin Islands culture, the Department continues to strengthen the territory's reputation as a premier destination for festivals and cultural tourism while ensuring these celebrations remain rooted in community, heritage, and local economic opportunity.

Strategic Festival Development/ Comprehensive Industry Study

As part of the Department's ongoing commitment to strengthening the U.S. Virgin Islands' festivals and events portfolio, the Division of Festivals commissioned a comprehensive research initiative to evaluate the feasibility of establishing an annual signature music festival while supporting broader tourism planning and destination development efforts.

The study, conducted by Public Strategy Group (PSG), included surveys of more than **1,700 respondents**, including **558 U.S. Virgin Islands residents** and **1,197 mainland U.S. consumers**, to assess public sentiment, destination awareness, and market demand for a signature music festival. The research demonstrated broad support for the initiative, with **79 percent of Territory residents** and **88 percent of mainland respondents** expressing support for the creation of an annual music festival.

The findings also reinforced the economic value of destination events. Among Territory residents, **81 percent** indicated that an annual music festival would strengthen local businesses, while **80 percent** believed it would generate meaningful economic benefits for residents and the broader community. These findings underscore the important role festivals can play in driving visitation, increasing visitor spending, supporting small businesses, and expanding economic opportunities throughout the Territory.

In addition to the feasibility study, PSG analyzed 2025 visitor data, developed updated visitor profiles, created a comprehensive visitor database, and provided market insights and strategic recommendations to guide the Department's future tourism marketing and event development efforts. The consultant also developed a Request for Proposals (RFP) framework to support a competitive procurement process should the Department elect to move forward with implementation of an annual signature music festival. Collectively, these efforts provide the Department with a strong foundation for data-driven decision-making and reinforce its commitment to developing festivals and events that generate measurable economic and tourism benefits for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Looking ahead, the Department will continue to evaluate opportunities to expand its portfolio of signature events that showcase the culture, music, and heritage of the U.S. Virgin Islands while attracting new visitors, encouraging repeat visitation, and creating sustainable economic impact for residents, local businesses, and communities across the Territory.

Additional Events and Festivals

- UberSoca
- King of the Wing
- Little League Baseball Tournament (off-island)
- Rhythms at Sunset (Our Town Frederiksted)
- Agriculture Fair
- Pate Festival
- Coconut Festival
- Ten Sleepless Knights
- Bordeaux Farmers Event (We Grow Food Inc.)
- Taste of St. Croix
- Caribbean Posh Weekend (Women's Empowerment)

- Look Jam Series (Fort Fete - STT & Vanilla Sky - STX)
- Rise & Whine (STX)
- PTO (STT)
- Butter Bread & Jam (STT)

Visitor Experience

The Visitor Experience Division remains integral to the U.S. Virgin Islands tourism product, serving as the frontline connection between visitors and the authentic warmth, culture, and hospitality that define the Territory. Through exceptional visitor services, workforce development, tourism education, cultural programming, and community engagement, the Division plays a critical role in ensuring every guest receives a memorable and meaningful Virgin Islands welcome.

Throughout Fiscal Year 2026, the Division strengthened its operations through strategic hiring, professional certifications, and expanded tourism education initiatives. Investments in Tourism Ambassadors, greeters, student interns, and hospitality professionals enhanced destination knowledge, cultural awareness, and service excellence while expanding the Department's ability to engage visitors before, during, and after their arrival.

The Division also continued to strengthen partnerships and community outreach efforts, increasing opportunities to showcase the Territory's heritage, traditions, and local experiences. These initiatives reinforce the U.S. Virgin Islands' reputation as a premier Caribbean destination while supporting the Department's commitment to delivering exceptional customer service.

Continued investment in the Visitor Experience Division will support expanded staffing, enhanced cultural programming, modernized visitor engagement resources, employee development, and workforce training initiatives. These efforts will strengthen the Territory's tourism competitiveness, support local businesses, encourage repeat visitation, and ensure every visitor leaves with a lasting and positive impression of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Greeter Trainings and Workforce Development

The Visitor Experience Division continues to invest in workforce development initiatives that strengthen destination knowledge, hospitality excellence, and service standards among the Territory's frontline tourism professionals. Through enhanced training programs, educational opportunities, and experiential learning, the Division ensures that Greeters and Tourism Ambassadors are equipped to provide visitors with an authentic, informed, and welcoming U.S. Virgin Islands experience.

Following the relaunch of the Greeter Training Program in October 2025, Department leadership and Division directors implemented an enhanced curriculum designed to prepare current and

prospective Greeters with industry-relevant skills focused on hospitality excellence, destination knowledge, airport operations, visitor engagement, customer service, and emergency response procedures.

To date, **36 new Greeters have been certified** through the updated program, strengthening the Department's frontline visitor experience efforts. The newly certified Greeters are distributed throughout the Territory as follows:

- **St. Croix:** 18
- **St. John:** 1
- **St. Thomas:** 17

The Division also continued expanding the knowledge and professionalism of its Tourism Ambassadors through educational and experiential learning opportunities. Ambassadors participated in a destination education session hosted by **CC1, distributor of Cruzan Rum**, gaining valuable insight into the history of Cruzan Rum, its cultural significance within the Virgin Islands, and the production and distribution process. This experience enhanced their ability to share authentic stories and cultural connections with visitors.

To further strengthen destination expertise, Tourism Ambassadors participated in island familiarization tours featuring historical landmarks, new attractions, tourism developments, and key points of interest throughout the Territory. These immersive experiences allow Ambassadors to better connect visitors with the people, places, and traditions that make the U.S. Virgin Islands a unique and memorable destination.

Youth Education, Internships and Community Engagement

The Visitor Experience Division continues to engage Virgin Islands youth through educational and workforce development initiatives designed to build awareness of the importance of tourism, hospitality, and cultural preservation. Through the **Tourism Speaks** initiative, students are introduced to the vital role tourism plays in the Territory's economy, career opportunities within the industry, the value of exceptional customer service, and the importance of preserving the culture and traditions that define the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Division also expanded opportunities for youth workforce development through its internship program, providing students with hands-on experience in visitor services, hospitality, and destination engagement. Across the Territory, interns supported Visitor Experience operations while gaining valuable professional skills and exposure to careers within the tourism industry.

On **St. Croix**, the program included **11 interns**, with one summer intern sponsored through the Office of Senator Kurt Vialet and three additional interns funded through the Department of Labor. At the conclusion of the program, interns extended their community impact by supporting the Boys & Girls Club Summer Program. On **St. Thomas and St. John**, the Division supported **five intern greeters**, including one summer intern and four additional intern greeters funded through the Department of Labor and the Office of Senator Fonseca. Together, these efforts

strengthened the Territory's pipeline of future tourism professionals while providing valuable workforce development opportunities for Virgin Islands youth.

The Division also continued its partnership with the **Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA)** through the annual Caribbean Essay and Poster Competition, encouraging students to explore tourism, environmental stewardship, and the visitor experience. This year, the U.S. Virgin Islands earned regional recognition when **Charlotte Amalie High School student Tamya Davis** received first place in the Caribbean Senior Essay Competition for her essay, *"If I Were a Cruise Passenger, What Would I Like to Do or See in My Country?"* Her achievement highlights the creativity of Virgin Islands students and their understanding of the Territory's tourism potential.

Beyond classroom and workforce development initiatives, the Division continues to promote community involvement and service among youth participants. As part of a community service initiative, interns participated in a Day of Giving, providing essential items to residents of Genip Gardens in Frederiksted, while the **Rising Stars Youth Steel Orchestra** contributed a cultural performance celebrating the Territory's musical heritage.

Through these initiatives, the Visitor Experience Division continues to strengthen the connection between tourism, education, workforce development, and community pride while inspiring the next generation of Virgin Islands ambassadors.

Cultural Experiences and Visitor Engagement

Continued growth and a focus on enhancing the visitor experience remain central to the Department of Tourism's efforts. Throughout the year, the Department expanded on-island engagement opportunities designed to create memorable experiences for visitors while showcasing the Territory's rich cultural identity and heritage, including:

- Performances by the **Rising Stars Steel Pan Serenaders** in both St. Thomas and St. Croix
- **Cruzan Rum** education and tastings at ports of entry, highlighting the Territory's rum heritage and cultural traditions
- **Moko Jumbies and cultural dancers** featured at ports of entry and major in-Territory MICE events, providing authentic cultural experiences for visitors and meeting attendees

Visitor Assistance

The Visitor Experience Division continues to provide essential support and resources to travelers throughout their journey in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Through its visitor assistance offices and welcome centers, the Division delivers personalized service, destination guidance, and timely information that enhances the overall visitor experience. During the reporting period, the St. Thomas Office assisted 1,264 visitors, the St. Croix Office assisted 168 visitors, the St. Thomas Welcome Center supported approximately 14,000 visitors, and the St. John Welcome Center assisted 285 visitors.

These frontline touchpoints remain a critical component of the Department's commitment to exceptional hospitality, ensuring visitors receive a warm Virgin Islands welcome while having access to the information and resources needed to maximize their experience in the Territory.

Accessibility and Inclusive Tourism

In partnership with Government House, the Department of Tourism is embarking on a campaign to evaluate and elevate accessibility and disability access throughout the Territory. Centered on a partnership with **Wheel the World**, a leading accessible travel platform, the Department aims to strengthen connectivity with the broader disability community and position the U.S. Virgin Islands as a more inclusive and welcoming destination for all travelers.

Wheel the World is recognized as a global leader in accessible travel, helping travelers with disabilities confidently discover, plan, and experience destinations that meet their individual needs. Through a platform featuring **more than 5,000 verified accessible hotels, activities, and experiences**, as well as a community of more than **180,000 members**, Wheel the World provides travelers with trusted information to make informed decisions about their journeys. The platform also works directly with destinations and tourism partners to identify accessibility opportunities and improve the travel experience for visitors with mobility, vision, and hearing disabilities, senior travelers, and their companions.

Through this collaboration, the Department will assess accessibility throughout the Territory, identify opportunities for improvement, and enhance awareness of accessible experiences, accommodations, and services available throughout St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas. This initiative reflects the Department's continued commitment to ensuring tourism growth is inclusive, equitable, and representative of all travelers who wish to experience the culture, beauty, and hospitality of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Visitor Emergency Response and Support

The Visitor Experience Division serves as the Department's frontline response team during visitor emergencies, providing compassionate, professional, and timely assistance to travelers and their families during challenging circumstances. The Division works closely with hospitals, airlines, cruise lines, emergency responders, the Virgin Islands Police Department Victim Advocate, tourism partners, and family members to coordinate resources, facilitate communication, and support visitors throughout emergency situations.

During the reporting period, the Division coordinated visitor assistance and response efforts for a range of incidents, including:

- One (1) vehicular homicide
- One (1) safari vehicle accident
- Six (6) drowning incidents
- One (1) robbery incident
- Twenty-five (25) medical emergencies

- Three (3) deaths aboard cruise ships
- One (1) airport fatality response involving a visitor
- One (1) shark bite fatality
- One (1) visitor fall from a pier requiring assistance

Through these efforts, the Visitor Experience Division continues to demonstrate the Department's commitment to visitor care, crisis coordination, and maintaining a compassionate destination experience—even during unforeseen and difficult circumstances.

Community Relations

- Communications

The Department of Tourism strengthened its connection with residents, visitors, stakeholders, and industry partners through a strategic communications program designed to promote transparency, increase public engagement, and reinforce tourism's role as a key driver of the Territory's economy. Through traditional media, digital platforms, newsletters, photography, videography, and documentary storytelling, the Department highlighted tourism initiatives, destination enhancements, community partnerships, festivals, and the people who make the U.S. Virgin Islands a world-class destination.

Territory-wide local radio tours provided residents with regular updates on tourism initiatives, destination development, emergency preparedness, festivals, and the economic impact of the visitor industry. Simultaneously, the Communications Team supported the Department's digital presence through strategic storytelling across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and other platforms, providing engaging content that increased public awareness and showcased the authentic culture, heritage, and experiences that define the U.S. Virgin Islands.

- Initiatives

Community Relations advanced initiatives that strengthened the connection between tourism and the local community through educational outreach, workforce development, and public engagement. The Department participated in numerous career fairs, educational presentations, youth leadership programs, and mentorship initiatives in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands, the Adult Education Center, the NAF Academy of Business, and other educational institutions.

These efforts introduced students and young professionals to career opportunities within the tourism industry while reinforcing the Department's commitment to cultivating the next generation of hospitality, marketing, communications, and public service leaders. The Communications Team also expanded community-focused storytelling by highlighting local businesses, entrepreneurs, artists, athletes, cultural traditions, and community organizations, reinforcing the vital connection between residents and the Territory's tourism product.

Destination Optimization

The Community Relations team continued to partner with the Marketing agency partner to support the growth of the Destination Optimization Program by engaging with local business owners to educate and promote the program's initiatives that enhance their digital reach to visitors and locals using platforms like Google.com.

These efforts complemented the Department's broader "Vested Interest" philosophy by encouraging community participation, supporting local businesses, and fostering shared responsibility for preserving the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and authentic experiences that distinguish the U.S. Virgin Islands.

UVI Cell

The Department continued to strengthen its partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands through student engagement, leadership development, educational programming, internship opportunities, conferences, and workforce development initiatives.

These collaborations provided students with meaningful exposure to careers in tourism, communications, marketing, hospitality, and public service while strengthening the relationship between higher education and one of the Territory's most important economic sectors. By investing in future talent, the Department is helping ensure a strong pipeline of Virgin Islanders prepared to lead the tourism industry for years to come.

Marketing

The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism continues to advance a comprehensive, data-driven marketing strategy that strengthens the Territory's position as a premier Caribbean destination while highlighting the unique identity, culture, and experiences of each island. Through innovative campaigns, strategic partnerships, and targeted audience engagement, the Department continues to deliver on the promise of the **"Naturally in Rhythm"** brand, inspiring travelers to discover the authenticity, accessibility, and vibrancy of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Department's overarching destination campaign, **"Naturally in Rhythm,"** focuses on building awareness and showcasing the Territory's collective appeal, while **"A Vibe Like No Other"** highlights the distinctive experiences and cultural richness of St. Croix. Together, these campaigns reinforce one of the U.S. Virgin Islands' strongest competitive advantages—the ability for U.S. citizens to experience an authentic Caribbean destination without the need for a passport.

Through intentional creative development, the Department continues to amplify the visual and cultural elements that make the U.S. Virgin Islands unique. Campaign storytelling incorporates recognizable cultural symbols, including the **Moko Jumbie, island madras, and other heritage-inspired elements**, ensuring that the destination brand reflects the people and

traditions that define the Territory. This connection between brand identity and community pride is evident throughout the islands, including the recent Public Works destination signage installation in St. Croix, which has generated excitement among residents and visitors alike.

Building upon this foundation, the Department continues to expand its reach through immersive activations and strategic partnerships that connect with travelers through music, food, sports, entertainment, and cultural experiences. These efforts allow prospective visitors to experience the essence of the Territory before arrival while creating meaningful connections with key audiences.

The Department's marketing strategy prioritizes high-value traveler segments, including luxury travelers, Black and African American travelers, LGBTQ+ travelers, families, millennials, Caribbean diaspora audiences, and travelers with demonstrated interest in the Caribbean and the U.S. Virgin Islands. By combining audience insights with performance data, the Department continues to maximize marketing efficiency and reach travelers most likely to convert from inspiration to visitation.

Marketing efforts remain concentrated within key feeder markets supported by direct air access to Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas and Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix, including:

- New York
- Chicago
- Atlanta
- Los Angeles
- Miami
- Houston
- Dallas
- Orlando
- Philadelphia
- Toronto

Paid Digital Marketing Performance and Economic Impact

The Territory's continued tourism growth is supported by a sophisticated digital marketing ecosystem designed to guide travelers throughout the consumer journey—from awareness and engagement to trip planning and booking.

In 2026, dedicated Meta campaigns generated more than **19 million impressions, 440,000 landing page views**, and **2.4 million completed video views**. These campaigns maintained strong efficiency metrics, including a **\$0.18 cost per landing page view** and a **2.79% link click-through rate**, exceeding industry benchmarks.

According to the Department's 2026 attribution reporting and partnership data from **ADARA and Tourism Economics**, paid media efforts generated more than **55 million measurable media impressions** and supported increased digital engagement with the destination.

Tourism marketing investments continue to contribute to measurable economic performance. According to STR, the Territory generated **\$254.8 million in aggregated lodging revenue**, representing an **18.1% year-over-year increase**, with overall occupancy approaching **74%**.

During the first six months of 2026, the USVI brand digital campaign delivered more than **110 million impressions** across in-market tactics and generated more than **60,000 website clicks**. Pre-roll video placements achieved an **87% completion rate**, demonstrating strong audience engagement.

TikTok campaigns generated **22 million impressions**, achieved a **\$1.83 cost per click**, and maintained performance within or above industry benchmarks, further expanding the Department's ability to reach emerging traveler audiences.

These results provide a strong foundation for the Department's FY2026 marketing strategy and reflect continued demand for the destination, as demonstrated by record first-quarter 2026 visitor arrivals of **303,388**, representing double-digit year-over-year growth.

Website Performance and Content Strategy

VisitUSVI.com remains a critical component of the Department's destination marketing ecosystem, serving as a centralized resource for trip planning, accommodations, island experiences, events, transportation information, and travel logistics.

In 2026, organic search accounted for **32% of website traffic**, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Department's content strategy and the long-term value of investments in search visibility and destination storytelling. Organic engagement continues to increase marketing efficiency by extending the reach and lifespan of destination content beyond paid placements.

During the first six months of 2026, VisitUSVI.com generated more than **203 million sessions**, representing a **24% increase** compared to the same period in the prior year. Average session duration reached **3 minutes and 56 seconds**, significantly exceeding the industry benchmark of **2 minutes and 52 seconds**, demonstrating strong traveler engagement and intent.

To further support airlift growth and improve the traveler journey, the Department expanded its email marketing program and launched a **Route-Specific Content Strategy**. This initiative transformed VisitUSVI.com into a centralized resource for airline connectivity, allowing travelers to easily identify direct flight options by market while providing airline partners with a visible demonstration of the Department's commitment to supporting route performance.

From May 1, 2025, through March 31, 2026, airline campaign efforts generated:

- **16.3 million impressions**
- **10.3 million video views**
- **242,000 landing page views**
- **\$56,000 in total campaign investment**

This strategy reinforced the value of combining destination inspiration with practical travel information. By serving as a trusted resource for flight connectivity, the Department strengthened relationships with airline partners, supported route development efforts, and contributed to increased passenger activity to both St. Thomas and St. Croix.

Marketing Industry Recognition

The Department's creative and digital marketing efforts continue to be recognized across the industry, reinforcing the strength of the U.S. Virgin Islands brand and its position as a leader in destination marketing.

2025 Internet Advertising Awards

- Outstanding Website, VisitUSVI.com

2025 Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards

- St. John recognized among the 2025 Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards honorees

2025 ESTO Awards

- U.S. Virgin Islands named a finalist for the Immersive Experiences Award for "How USVI Activations Are Elevating Emerging Markets"

2025 HSMAI Adrian Awards

- USVI's "Experiential Activations Introduce the USVI to New Markets" entry won Bronze
- USVI's "U.S. Virgin Islands Website Redesign" entry won Silver

2026 USA Today's 10 Best Caribbean Islands to Visit in 2026

- St. Croix ranked in the top 10 on USA Today's 10 Best Caribbean Islands to Visit in 2026

2026 Caribbean Travel Awards

- USVI won big at this year's Caribbean Travel Awards 2026, securing wins for New Hotel of the Year, Caribbean Cruise Destination of the Year, and Experiential Destination of the Year

2026 U.S. News & World Report's Best Vacations

- The U.S. Virgin Islands has been named an award winner in the U.S. News & World Report's Best Vacations rankings. [Best Family Vacations in the Caribbean](#) (#1)

Public Relations

In fiscal year 2026, the Department of Tourism continued to elevate the U.S. Virgin Islands' public relations strategy by expanding storytelling opportunities across a diverse range of media platforms and audiences. Through a combination of proactive media relations, strategic storytelling, press releases, targeted distribution efforts, and participation in premier travel media marketplaces, Development Counsellors International secured **5,880 media placements** from July 1, 2025, through July 1, 2026, generating **14.9 billion impressions** and an estimated **\$261.6 million in advertising value** on behalf of the territory. During this period, the team distributed **24 press releases** highlighting key tourism initiatives, destination developments, cultural celebrations, industry milestones, and experiences that continue to reinforce the U.S. Virgin Islands as a leading Caribbean destination.

As part of its proactive media engagement strategy, the Territory was represented at several of the travel industry's most influential networking events, including **TravMedia's International Media Marketplace (IMM)**, the **Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's Caribbean Travel Marketplace**, and the **Caribbean Tourism Organization's Caribbean Week in New York**. These events provided valuable opportunities to strengthen relationships with travel media, editors, broadcasters, and content creators while positioning the destination for future earned media coverage. At IMM, Department representatives and DCI met with leading journalists and influencers, including renowned travel journalist Peter Greenberg, Black Travel Alliance President Martinique Lewis, freelance writers Erik Trinidad and Sheeka Sanahori, Forbes contributor Jeanine Barone, travel expert Troy Petenbrink of *Good Day DC*, and numerous other influential media. These meetings continue to generate editorial opportunities, media visits, and destination coverage that extend well beyond the events themselves.

Press Coverage Spotlights

-iHeart Radio Partnership Shines Virgin Islands Culture to the World: iHeart Radio's Angela Yee returned to St. Thomas Carnival and hosted two live broadcasts of her nationally syndicated midday show, *Way Up with Angela Yee*, at the West Indian Company, Ltd. Dock in Charlotte Amalie. The program, which originates from iHeartMedia's Power 105.1 in New York, reaches more than 30 urban contemporary and hip-hop stations nationwide, including major markets such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Detroit. Alongside her co-hosts, including The Jasmine Brand, Jermaine "Maino" Coleman, and DJ Whutever, the show featured interviews with representatives from the Virgin Islands and throughout the Caribbean, highlighting the territory's culture, people, and Carnival celebrations. A special moment during the live broadcast recognized Virgin Islands native Halimah Roebuck, owner of Roe FM Radio, which serves as a syndication partner bringing the show to audiences in the U.S. Virgin Islands and British Virgin Islands.

Guests and interviews:

-Governor Albert Bryan Jr.:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EYhglQ_n5I&t=17s

-Director Ian Turnbull: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvv-5txkXNs>

-Shaw HP and Adam O: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59IGFhvzHEA>

-Verse Simmonds and Sevyn Streeter:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4uoNf8F0Kk>

-Mr. Killa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nHluP6JEt0g>

-Trilla G: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59IGFhvzHEA>

-Mozart La Para: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIkhfB7vo5w&t=12s>

-Swaggy Sie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jL50VdcJkDg>

-Cassie Yeung: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAzwwQxMLg4>

Full Shows:

Way Up With Shamar Marco + We At J'ouvert In St. Thomas:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy6ulGeTek0&t=555s>

Live From St. Thomas With Special Guests:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPvLB5sZ0Ac&t=258s>

Elevating the U.S. Virgin Islands Through Traditional Media: As the media landscape continues to evolve, traditional media remains a powerful driver of destination awareness and third-party credibility. Through strategic media outreach, relationship building, and hosted press visits, the Department of Tourism secured high-impact coverage across leading print, digital, and broadcast outlets, reinforcing the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination. Throughout the year, the territory was featured in top-tier publications including *Forbes*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Caribbean Journal*, *Time*, *AFAR*, *USA TODAY*, *Travel Weekly*, *AARP*, *Islands*, *EBONY*, *Essence*, *Travel Noire*, *Time Out*, *Beaches*, *Travel and Tour World*, as well as major digital platforms including MSN, Yahoo!, and AOL. The team also expanded the territory's broadcast presence, securing multiple television opportunities, including a return feature on FOX 5 DC for the second consecutive year.

FAM Trips Spotlights

-Crucian Christmas Festival Media & Influencer Visit: During the 2025–2026 Crucian Christmas Festival season, the team hosted a dynamic group of celebrities, media personalities, journalists, influencers, and brand partners to showcase the culture, community, and experiences that make St. Croix's Festival season a signature destination event. The visit welcomed home singer and actress **Naturi Naughton**, whose father is from St. Croix; rapper, radio personality, and podcast host **Jermaine "Maino" Coleman**, whose mother is from St. Thomas; and lifestyle influencer **Danie Sierra**, whose family owns Chicken Shack. Additional participants included iHeartMedia partner **Angela Yee**, comedian **Donnell Rawlings**, actress and dancer **Jivanta Roberts**, SiriusXM personality **Swaggy Sie**, *The Jasmine Brand*, Puerto Rican culture influencer **Dean Huertas**, New York Times bestselling chef and influencer **Cassie Yeung**, and **Trini Jungle Juice**. Through immersive Festival experiences, cultural celebrations, culinary moments, and community connections, the visit highlighted the authentic spirit of St. Croix and the deep-rooted ties that continue to bring visitors and Virgin Islands descendants home. The activation generated significant social momentum, resulting in more than **1,200 Instagram and TikTok posts, 662.3K**

engagements, 12.4 million impressions/reach, and an estimated \$18.9 million in earned media value.

-AgriFest Media Visit: In February 2026, the team hosted an intimate media visit centered around St. Croix's annual AgriFest, featuring a food and travel influencer and the founder of BlackFoodie.co **Eden Hagos** (@edenthefoodie) and BBC Travel journalist **Lynn Brown**. The itinerary celebrated St. Croix's agricultural heritage and culinary traditions through immersive experiences at AgriFest, visits with local farmers and producers, and authentic dining experiences, reinforcing the island's position as a destination for agritourism, culinary exploration, and cultural connection.

-8 Tuff Miles Media Visit: From February 26–March 2, 2026, the team hosted media around St. John's 2026 8 Tuff Miles Road Race, welcoming **Ali Nolan** of *RUN by Outside* and **Judy Antell** of *SheBuysTravel* and *Wheels & Eats*. The itinerary highlighted the race experience while showcasing the island's outdoor adventures, Virgin Islands National Park, culinary offerings, and accommodations. The visit resulted in three earned media placements, including *RUN by Outside*'s "7 of Running's Most Underrated Races," *SheBuysTravel*'s "Paradise Found: Running the 8 Tuff Miles Race in USVI" (Girls Getaway Guide), and *Wheels & Eats*' "Uphill Battle: 8 Tuff Miles in St. John."

IMAGE

-Wellness and Longevity Media Visit: In March 2026, the team hosted a targeted wellness and longevity-focused media visit featuring travel and lifestyle influencer **Ritika Gandhi** (@flights.and.outfits), freelance travel journalist **Michele Herrmann** (whose work has appeared in *Forbes*, *AFAR*, and *Travel + Leisure*), and **Johnny Motley**, contributor to *The Manual* and *Men's Journal*. The customized itinerary showcased the territory's emerging wellness offerings through immersive experiences across St. Thomas and St. John, including hiking, snorkeling, farm-to-table dining, and nature-based activities that positioned the U.S. Virgin Islands as an ideal destination for restorative, wellness-focused travel.

-Additional Media and Journalists: Jasmine Henderson (The Jasmine Brand), Laurie Fullerton (Sail Magazine), Jeanine Barone (Forbes), Jasmine Joseph (Blavity), Rebecca High (Islands Magazine), David Dickstein (Media News Group), Godfrey Hall (British Guild of Travel Writers), Stephen Bennett (Uncommon Caribbean)

Media Recognition and Awards

The U.S. Virgin Islands continued to receive significant recognition from leading travel organizations and publications, reinforcing the territory's position as a premier Caribbean destination. At the 2026 Caribbean Travel Awards, the territory was recognized as **Caribbean Cruise Destination of the Year**, **Experiential Destination of the Year**, and **New Hotel of the Year** for The Saint on St. John. St. Croix was named among *USA Today*'s **10Best Caribbean Islands to Visit**, ranking No. 6, while Secret Harbour Beach Resort earned a **2026 Tripadvisor Travelers' Choice Award**, placing it among the top 10% of hotels worldwide. The territory was also recognized by *Porthole Cruise and Travel Magazine* as the **2025 Cruise Destination of the Year**, and St. John was named among *Travel + Leisure*'s **World's Best Islands in the Caribbean for 2026**, further highlighting the U.S. Virgin Islands' growing appeal across leisure, cruise, and experiential travel audiences.

Influencer

The influencer marketing landscape has evolved from an emerging channel into a powerful marketing tool for engaging audiences and connecting with travelers and communities worldwide. The Department of Tourism remains at the forefront of this evolution, leveraging strategic influencer partnerships and collaborating with agency partners to develop an impactful program that extends the reach and visibility of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Initially centered around the Territory's vibrant Carnival celebrations, the program has expanded to include a diverse network of creators who showcase the full breadth of the U.S. Virgin Islands' offerings, including culture, culinary experiences, adventure, and the unique stories that define each island. Through collaborative partnerships with influential voices, the Department continues to maximize destination exposure, generating authentic storytelling and significant earned media value while connecting with new and engaged audiences.

This year, the team continued to strengthen relationships with influencers, working with trusted voices to authentically share the destination's experiences with their audiences. These strategic collaborations delivered measurable value, with top influencer partners generating significant earned media exposure, including **Angela Yee (\$11,000)**, **Cassie Yeung (\$266,000)**, **Naturi Naughton (\$29,000)**, and **CapriCurves (\$119,000) in earned media value**. Additionally, the Department prioritized reconnecting with Virgin Islands descendants, whose deep-rooted ties to the Territory provide a meaningful perspective and help tell a more authentic, personal story of the islands.

Notable Influencers:

- Angela Yee
 - Radio Personality/
- Jermaine 'Maino' Coleman
 - American Rapper/ Radio Personality
- Nauri Naughton
 - Actress/ Singer
- Cassie Yeung
 - New York Times Best Seller Chef/ Digital Creator/ Food Influencer
- Dean Huertas
 - Culture and Travel Influencer
- Javanta Roberts
 - Dancer/ Actress/ Digital Creator
- Danie Sierra
 - Culture Influencer/ Digital Creator
- Donnel Rawlings
 - Comedian/ Actor
- Eden Hagos
 - Culinary Influencer/ Digital Creator
- Ritika Gandhi
 - Food and Lifestyle Digital Creator
- Destiny Owosu

- Travel and Lifestyle Digital Creator
- Keanda Vivar
 - Celebrity Makeup Artist/ Beauty and Fashion Digital Creator
- Zahra Elise
 - Lifestyle Digital Creator/ Streamer
- Jasmine Joseph
 - Social Editor (Blavity, Inc)/ Lifestyle Digital Creator
- DJ Whatever
 - DJ and Radio Personality

Social Media

In fiscal year 2026, our organic social media strategy focused on supporting travelers throughout the decision-making journey, from initial inspiration to trip planning and booking.

Through destination storytelling, traveler-focused resources, and audience insights gathered through social listening, we created content designed to showcase the beauty, culture, and unique experiences of the U.S. Virgin Islands while addressing the questions and considerations travelers have when selecting and planning a vacation. By aligning content with traveler intent, we strengthened social media's role as both an inspiration and conversion tool across TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Threads, and X.

Key results include:

- **The U.S. Virgin Islands' social media audience grew to more than 333,000 followers and subscribers across major platforms, adding 67,600 new audience members during the fiscal year.** Growth was driven by both established and emerging channels, demonstrating the Department's ability to expand its reach among travelers at every stage of the journey.
- **TikTok led audience growth, adding 34,000 followers and reaching more than 70,000 followers in just over three years.** Despite publishing fewer videos year over year, the platform generated 31.8 million views (+30.6%) and more than 505,000 engagements (+30.7%), reinforcing its role as a powerful discovery channel for new and prospective visitors.
- **LinkedIn delivered exceptional growth across every major metric, with impressions increasing 164%, engagement rising 239%, and engagement rate improving 28.2%.** Launched in spring 2024, the platform nearly doubled its audience during FY26 and continued to establish the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism as a leading voice among Caribbean DMOs while increasing visibility among business travelers, higher-income leisure travelers, meetings and event planners, and industry

stakeholders.

- **Instagram organic impressions increased 37.4% to 1.17 million**, extending the reach of destination storytelling and reinforcing the platform's role as a key source of travel inspiration.
- **Pinterest continued to serve as a high-value planning platform, generating 83,700 impressions, 4,150 engagements, 761 saves and reaching an audience of more than 41,000 users.** The platform remains particularly effective for connecting with travelers actively researching destinations, experiences and trip itineraries.
- **Social listening played a central role in content development throughout the year.** By identifying common traveler questions and considerations shared across platforms such as Reddit, YouTube and social media comments, the Department developed itineraries, travel tips and planning-focused content designed to reduce barriers to travel and encourage action.

Beyond platform metrics, FY26 reflected a strategic shift toward content designed to deliver value at every stage of the traveler journey. By combining destination inspiration with practical planning information and audience-driven insights, the DOT strengthened its ability to move potential visitors from awareness and consideration to confident trip planning and, ultimately, booking a trip to the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Sports and Lifestyle Marketing

The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to differentiate itself through strategic partnerships that leverage the power of sports, entertainment, music, and culture to elevate the Territory's global profile and inspire travel. By aligning with organizations and events that authentically connect with high-value audiences, the Department extends the reach of the U.S. Virgin Islands brand beyond traditional tourism marketing while creating meaningful engagement with prospective visitors.

Guided by market research and visitor insights, the Department continues to prioritize key source markets, including the New York Tri-State area, New England, the Midwest, Texas, and the Southeast. Through integrated campaigns, the Department engages diverse audiences across live events, broadcast and streaming platforms, digital media, social media, and experiential activations that position the Territory as a destination for year-round travel.

Current partnerships include the New York Jets, New York Mets, Boston Red Sox, Chicago Cubs, PGA, Fenway Sports Management, Roc Nation, and One MusicFest. Together, these collaborations provide a comprehensive suite of marketing opportunities, including branded content, television and streaming integrations, stadium and event signage, premium hospitality experiences, artist and athlete engagement, media opportunities, executive interviews, influencer collaborations, and immersive fan activations that generate awareness and drive travel consideration.

These strategic partnerships have also contributed to measurable increases in destination awareness, market engagement, and visitor demand, helping strengthen connectivity between the U.S. Virgin Islands and priority source markets. By leveraging the reach and influence of these organizations, the Department has supported expanded airlift opportunities, including new and enhanced service from key markets such as **Chicago, Newark, New York, and Boston**, creating greater accessibility for travelers and supporting continued tourism growth.

The impact of these strategic efforts is reflected in strong performance across priority markets. Boston, in particular, has experienced significant growth, with year-to-date arrivals reaching 32,444 visitors, representing a 64.9 percent increase year-over-year. This growth underscores the value of targeted market engagement and strategic partnerships in strengthening demand, supporting air connectivity, and driving visitation to the Territory.

As consumer interests continue to evolve, the Department remains committed to investing in partnerships that reflect today's traveler—where sports, music, culture, and lifestyle intersect. These collaborations strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' brand, expand its reach among highly engaged audiences, support increased connectivity, and drive measurable visitation and economic impact across the Territory.

Building local visibility remains central to our marketing strategy. By investing in and promoting sporting events throughout the Territory, the Department not only enhances the visitor experience but also reinforces the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as a leading destination for sports tourism. Cross-departmental collaboration supports many of these efforts, and as we continue through this year, we look forward to working with the USVI Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation to attract more sports conferences and tournaments.

This year's events included:

- **U.S. Virgin Islands Paradise Jam** tournament features top and nationally ranked Division 1 NCAA Men's and Women's basketball teams. The annual event, which is broadcast on ESPN, ESPN2, and ESPNU and streamed across affiliate platforms, reaches millions of viewers. Every year, the tournament brings nearly 1,500 visitors to the island of St. Thomas, accounting for nearly 4,100 room nights while broadcasting to nearly 70 million U.S. homes.
- **YES Tournament** hosts Division 2- and 3-Men's Basketball teams from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The 2025 tournament, which was held at the Eudora Kean and Digma Wheatley Gymnasiums in St. Thomas featured Dillard University, Virginia Union University, Wilberforce University, St. Thomas University (Miami), Southern University of New Orleans, and the University of the Virgin Islands.
- The **St. Thomas International Regatta**, sponsored by the Department of Tourism, remains one of the most prestigious in the Caribbean. Known as the "Crown Jewel" of Caribbean racing, the event attracts thousands of yachting enthusiasts who come for the island's consistent trade winds, warm waters, and renowned hospitality.

- The **8 Tuff Miles** race on St. John, Virgin Islands, covers 8.38 miles from Cruz Bay to Coral Bay, climbing from near sea level to a high point of 999 feet before descending again. Many runners train by simulating this challenging elevation, which is nearly as high as the 86th floor of the Empire State Building. The course offers a unique blend of endurance and scenic views that make it a standout challenge.

Lifestyle Marketing Events:

One Music Festival: The U.S. Virgin Islands' presence within the music and entertainment landscape continues to expand as the Department of Tourism identifies new opportunities to connect with target traveler audiences while showcasing the Territory's vibrant culture, people, and unique experiences.

Now in its second year of participation at **One Musicfest in Atlanta, Georgia**, the Department delivered its most successful activation to date, generating the highest level of traffic since joining the festival. Strategically positioned in the center of the festival footprint, the activation provided attendees with an immersive representation of the U.S. Virgin Islands through live entertainment, cultural experiences, and destination storytelling. The experience featured performances from Virgin Islands-based DJs **Deli Banger, DJ Keg, and DJ SupaTrakz Intl**, alongside cultural elements that celebrated the Territory's rich heritage, including traditional dancers and Moko Jumbies.

The activation engaged more than **100,000 festival attendees**, creating meaningful opportunities to increase destination awareness, grow newsletter subscriptions, expand social media engagement, and inspire future travel consideration. Participation in One Musicfest remains a strategic component of the Department's route development and market expansion strategy, particularly within the Atlanta metropolitan area, which continues to serve as an important gateway market for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

ROC Nation Super Bowl LX: The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to strengthen its presence within the entertainment and lifestyle space through innovative, strategic partnerships that leverage cultural influence, diaspora connections, and high-profile opportunities to elevate destination awareness. The Department of Tourism continues to identify platforms that align with key audiences and provide meaningful opportunities to showcase the Territory's culture, people, and brand on influential stages.

In February 2026, a delegation featuring **Moko Jumbies and cultural dancers** represented the U.S. Virgin Islands at the invite-only **Roc Nation pre-Super Bowl event**, one of the most prominent gatherings at the intersection of sports, music, and entertainment. The event brought together leading figures across the industry, including **Jay-Z, Fat Joe, J. Balvin, Robinson Canó, Tom Brady, Dez Bryant, Bradley Chubb, Rapsody, Todd Gurley, Michael Pittman Jr., Remy Ma**, and other influential entertainment and sports personalities. Through this cultural showcase, the Department created an opportunity to amplify the U.S. Virgin Islands brand

among a highly engaged audience while highlighting the Territory's rich heritage and unique cultural assets.

Aspen Food and Wine Festival: The U.S. Virgin Islands continues to expand its presence within the culinary and lifestyle space through strategic partnerships that showcase the Territory's unique flavors, cultural heritage, and world-class hospitality experiences to influential audiences. As travelers increasingly seek authentic, immersive experiences centered around food, culture, and local connection, the Department of Tourism continues to leverage high-profile platforms that align with these evolving interests.

In 2026, the U.S. Virgin Islands returned to the **Food & Wine Classic in Aspen, Colorado**, powered by **People, Inc.**, as the event's exclusive Caribbean destination partner and co-title sponsor. One of the nation's premier culinary festivals, the event provided an opportunity to introduce thousands of attendees—including culinary enthusiasts, media, industry leaders, and luxury travelers—to the vibrant flavors and cultural traditions of the Territory.

Representing the Territory were renowned Virgin Islands chefs **Digby Stridiron of St. Croix** and **Kerish Robles of St. Thomas**, who showcased the diversity of U.S. Virgin Islands cuisine through dishes inspired by locally rooted ingredients and multicultural influences. The activation featured signature offerings including Scallop & Lobster Escabeche, Oxtail & Johnny Cakes, Fish and Fungi Canapés, Lentil Stew, and Cruzan Rum Cake with Mango Glaze, creating an immersive culinary experience that celebrated the Territory's heritage.

The activation generated significant engagement throughout the three-day festival, drawing some of the event's longest lines and reinforcing the growing recognition of the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier culinary destination. Beyond consumer engagement, the partnership provided valuable exposure among media, influencers, and travel tastemakers, strengthening awareness of the Territory's dining scene, local chefs, and authentic cultural experiences.

Through partnerships such as Food & Wine, the Department continues to strategically position the U.S. Virgin Islands among high-value audiences while highlighting the people, businesses, and cultural assets that make the Territory a destination unlike any other.

Film Office

The United States Virgin Islands continues to strategically position itself as a competitive destination for film, television, and commercial production within an increasingly dynamic global production marketplace. As the industry continues to recover from the prolonged slowdown following the 2023 Hollywood labor strikes, productions are navigating tighter budgets, ongoing studio consolidation, and rapidly evolving technologies that are reshaping how and where content is created.

Despite these industry-wide challenges, the Territory continues to attract quality productions that showcase the beauty and diversity of the U.S. Virgin Islands. During the past year, the Film

Office supported several self-financed independent film projects, including a feature drama filmed primarily on St. Croix under the direction of an Academy Award-nominated filmmaker. The Territory also welcomed multiple productions from popular HGTV franchise series, along with commercial and fashion photography campaigns for nationally recognized brands, including Aéropostale.

Looking ahead, the Film Office is actively engaged in discussions with several film and television projects currently in development and pre-production, including a new television series featuring a major A-list actor. These opportunities reflect continued industry interest in the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier production destination.

At the same time, the Territory continues to face structural challenges that can affect its competitiveness for larger-scale productions. Limited availability of experienced local crew in specialized production departments, coupled with a shortage of essential production equipment, often requires productions to import personnel and resources. The additional costs associated with airfare, accommodations and shipping can significantly increase production budgets, particularly for projects with casts and crews of 25 to 50 or more, making the Territory less competitive when compared to destinations with more established production infrastructure.

The Film Office has also seen a growing number of production companies, particularly those behind established television series, seeking alternative financing arrangements or in-kind tourism partnerships. Competing destinations increasingly offer comprehensive incentive packages that may include direct financial support, hotel accommodations and destination marketing partnerships in exchange for guaranteed on-screen exposure, destination branding and social media promotion featuring high-profile talent.

While interest in the USVI STARS Incentive Program continues to grow, the current structure presents limitations for both larger studio productions seeking more competitive incentives and independent filmmakers who are unable to meet the program's \$250,000 minimum qualified expenditure requirement. Recognizing these challenges, the Commissioner and the Film Office have initiated discussions with the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to explore opportunities for strengthening the program and enhancing the Territory's overall competitiveness.

Additionally, fiscal constraints have limited the Film Office's ability to participate in several long-standing industry conferences, trade events, and advertising opportunities that have historically served as important platforms for promoting the U.S. Virgin Islands to production decision-makers. Continued investment in strategic industry engagement remains critical to highlighting the Territory's unique advantages, including its diverse and cinematic locations, rich cultural heritage, expanding hotel inventory, direct air service from major U.S. gateways, English-speaking workforce, and status as a destination under the U.S. flag.

International Marketing

Canada: Canadian travelers remain an important international market for the U.S. Virgin Islands, particularly those seeking warm-weather escapes, authentic cultural experiences, and convenient Caribbean vacations. While broader travel patterns have shifted in 2026, with many Canadians reevaluating travel to the United States amid economic and geopolitical factors, international leisure travel remains a priority, presenting an opportunity for destinations that can clearly differentiate their value and visitor experience.

The Department's FY 2026 strategy remained focused on proactive media engagement and destination education, targeting Canada's most influential travel, lifestyle, and consumer media. Through sustained relationship-building and strategic storytelling, the Department continued to position the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination offering rich culture, year-round sunshine, and seamless island experiences. Feedback from Canadian journalists continues to reinforce that immersive, firsthand destination experiences remain the strongest driver of meaningful editorial coverage.

In June 2026, the U.S. Virgin Islands agency partner participated in Travel Media Association of Canada's (TMAC) Media Marketplace, connecting with more than 75 accredited travel journalists and content creators. Established in 1994, TMAC represents nearly 400 of Canada's leading travel writers, photographers, broadcasters, videographers, bloggers, and communications professionals. The event provided a valuable opportunity to share destination updates, strengthen existing media relationships, and cultivate new editorial opportunities that will continue generating earned media coverage throughout the coming year.

Denmark: Denmark remains the U.S. Virgin Islands' largest international source market, supported by deep historical and cultural ties that continue to distinguish the Territory from other Caribbean destinations. The Danish market represents a high-value visitor segment, with travelers averaging approximately **12-night stays** and an estimated **\$3,000 in visitor spending per person**, generating significant economic benefits for the Territory. While visitation has fluctuated in recent years due to changes in airlift and global travel conditions, the Department projects the market has the potential to return to approximately **10,000 annual visitors** through expanded air service and strengthened travel trade partnerships.

Throughout FY 2026, the Department continued to strengthen its presence in Denmark through strategic partnerships with tour operators, airlines, travel advisors, media, and destination stakeholders. Marketing initiatives focused on increasing destination awareness, supporting cooperative marketing campaigns, expanding travel trade engagement, and promoting the U.S. Virgin Islands' unique blend of cultural heritage, outdoor recreation, marine experiences, and authentic island hospitality. Current travel packages marketed in Denmark average nearly **14 days, with more than 9 days spent in the U.S. Virgin Islands**, demonstrating the Territory's strong appeal as a primary Caribbean destination rather than simply a stopover.

The Department also continued discussions with airline and tour operator partners regarding expanded air service opportunities, including development of a dedicated winter charter program for the **2027-2028** season. The proposed program would operate between December and Easter with **12 to 14 charter rotations**, supported by several of Denmark's leading tour

operators, creating significant opportunities to increase overnight visitation and strengthen one of the Territory's most loyal international markets.

To further expand the Territory's presence within the Nordic market, the Department participated in key travel trade events, including **Travel News Market Copenhagen** and the **Herning Travel Show**, Scandinavia's largest consumer travel exhibition, where Department representatives engaged directly with tour operators, travel advisors, airline partners, media representatives, and prospective travelers. These initiatives continue to strengthen awareness of the U.S. Virgin Islands and generate new opportunities for leisure, group, and specialty travel.

Looking ahead, the Department will continue building on the Territory's strong position in the Danish market by expanding airlift opportunities, strengthening travel trade partnerships, increasing destination marketing, and leveraging the unique historical relationship between Denmark and the U.S. Virgin Islands to drive sustainable visitor growth and long-term economic impact.

Italy: Italy remains a strategic emerging source market for the U.S. Virgin Islands and presents a valuable opportunity to diversify the Territory's international visitor base. Italian travelers continue to prioritize long-haul leisure travel and increasingly seek destinations that offer authentic cultural experiences, island exploration, culinary tourism, sustainability, and opportunities for independent travel, all areas in which the U.S. Virgin Islands is well positioned to compete.

The Territory is particularly attractive to Italian travelers interested in premium Caribbean experiences beyond traditional all-inclusive vacations. The U.S. Virgin Islands offers a unique combination of three distinct islands, world-class sailing and marine recreation, rich cultural heritage, historic sites, local cuisine, and easy island-hopping opportunities that align with evolving travel preferences in the Italian market.

Although the U.S. Virgin Islands maintained a tourism presence in Italy for many years, market activity has been limited since 2017. During that time, several competing Caribbean destinations, including Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Antigua, and the British Virgin Islands, have expanded their marketing investments and maintained dedicated tourism representation within Italy. Re-establishing the U.S. Virgin Islands' visibility in this market is essential to remaining competitive.

Connectivity between Italy and the Territory continues to improve through approximately 60 daily nonstop flights from major Italian cities to U.S. gateway airports, including New York, Boston, Miami, Atlanta, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Dallas. These connections provide convenient access to the U.S. Virgin Islands through existing domestic air service. The introduction of JetBlue's nonstop Milan-to-Boston service has created an additional opportunity to position the Territory as part of a broader U.S. and Caribbean travel itinerary.

During FY 2027, the Department will continue to strengthen its presence in Italy by expanding travel trade relationships, increasing destination visibility through public relations and digital

marketing initiatives, supporting targeted media and familiarization visits, enhancing Italian-language marketing assets, and pursuing cooperative opportunities with regional partners such as Puerto Rico and the British Virgin Islands. These initiatives are intended to increase overnight visitation, diversify the Territory's international visitor base, and generate long-term economic benefits for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Trade/ Sales

Throughout FY 2026, the Offshore Sales and MICE Division continued to advance the Department's mission of positioning the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination for leisure travel, meetings, incentives, conferences, and events. Through strategic sales initiatives, travel trade engagement, and targeted business development efforts, the Division strengthened the Territory's visibility in key domestic and international markets while expanding opportunities to drive overnight visitation and economic impact.

The Division continued to cultivate relationships with travel advisors, meeting planners, tour operators, wholesalers, consortia partners, and other industry stakeholders whose recommendations directly influence travel decisions. Through destination training programs, educational webinars, cooperative marketing initiatives, sales missions, and one-on-one partner engagement, the Division reinforced the competitive advantages of St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix while increasing awareness of the Territory's diverse tourism product.

A key component of the Division's strategy was maintaining a strong presence at premier national and international travel trade events. These engagements provided opportunities to showcase the U.S. Virgin Islands to qualified buyers, strengthen existing partnerships, generate new business leads, and position the Territory within the leisure, luxury, MICE, wedding, cruise, and specialty travel markets.

The Division's continued investment in relationship building and strategic market development has strengthened the U.S. Virgin Islands' competitive position and created new opportunities for future visitation and group business. These efforts support the Department's broader goals of expanding market share, increasing visitor spending, and generating sustainable economic benefits for the Territory.

Thus far, the Offshore Sales and MICE Division has represented the Territory at the following premier national and international industry events:

- AAA Travel Shows
- ALG Vacations and Ascend Conference
- American Black Film Festival
- Annapolis Boat Show
- Ascend Conference
- ASTA Caribbean Showcase
- ASTA Chapter Events and Roadshows

- Caribbean Travel Marketplace
- Caribbean Village Collaborations (multiple cities)
- CCRA Power Solutions Event
- Classic Vacations Connection Event (multiple cities)
- Delta Vacations University
- Destination Caribbean
- IPW
- Las Vegas Travel Agent Forum
- Luxury Travel Advisor's ULTRA Summit
- Midwest Travel Suppliers Association Tradeshow (multiple cities)
- Newport International Boat Show
- Romance Travel Forum
- Routes America & Routes World
- Seatrade Cruise Global
- Selling Luxury Travel (Virtual)
- Specialty Travel, Luxury, Film, and International Market Events
- Travel and Adventure Shows (multiple cities)
- Virtuoso Connect
- Virtuoso Travel Week
- Wedding and Honeymoon Trade Events
- World Travel Expo

MICE SALES

The Department's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) Division continues to strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as a competitive destination for group business. Through targeted sales initiatives, strategic partnerships, participation in industry trade shows, and direct engagement with meeting planners, the Division works to attract conferences, corporate meetings, incentive travel programs, association events, board meetings, and other group business that generate year-round economic activity throughout the Territory.

During FY 2026, the Division actively pursued qualified Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and cultivated relationships with meeting planners, destination management companies, and industry partners to convert business opportunities into confirmed programs. These efforts support increased hotel occupancy, room nights, visitor spending, transportation services, dining, excursions, and other tourism-related economic activity that benefits local businesses and residents.

To expand the Territory's visibility and generate new business opportunities, the Department maintained an active presence at key meetings and events, industry conferences, including:

- Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange (GMITE)
- IMEX America
- Planner Connect (multiple markets)
- TEAMS Conference & Expo

The Department also hosted targeted familiarization (FAM) tours for qualified meeting planners and travel advisors, providing firsthand exposure to the Territory's hotels, meeting venues, attractions, transportation services, cultural experiences, and hospitality partners. These visits remain an effective business development tool, helping decision-makers confidently recommend the U.S. Virgin Islands for future meetings, conferences, and incentive travel programs.

Additionally, the Department continues to leverage the power of local connectivity, with Virgin Islanders and members of the diaspora helping to generate group travel opportunities through their personal and professional networks. These relationships have helped attract a variety of affinity groups, including fraternities and sororities, professional associations, and other organizations seeking meaningful experiences that connect their members with the culture, hospitality, and unique offerings of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Collectively, these initiatives support the Department's strategy to diversify visitation, increase group travel, strengthen year-round demand, and maximize the economic impact of tourism across the U.S. Virgin Islands.

FY 27 Goals and Priorities

Mission and Messaging

In Fiscal Year 2027, the Department of Tourism will continue building on the strong momentum generated over the past year by advancing initiatives that strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' position as the premier destination in the Caribbean. As new hotel developments come online, existing properties continue to reinvest in their offerings, and additional air service expands access to the Territory, the Department remains focused on driving sustainable growth that benefits residents, visitors, and the local business community alike.

While the Department continues to navigate changes in the aviation landscape, including the loss of Spirit Airlines service, our outlook for the coming year remains strong. Through strategic partnerships with airline partners, targeted marketing initiatives, and expanded route development efforts, we will continue working to strengthen airlift, diversify market access, and position the Territory for long-term success.

Our marketing, communications, and public relations strategies will continue to showcase the authentic culture, natural beauty, and diverse experiences of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John through innovative campaigns, strategic partnerships, and compelling storytelling that distinguish the U.S. Virgin Islands in an increasingly competitive marketplace. At the same time, we will continue investing in destination stewardship, community engagement, and workforce development to ensure tourism growth enhances the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders.

During Fiscal Year 2027, the Department will:

- Strengthen tourism activity to increase Tourism Advertising Revolving Fund (TARF) revenues and support long-term industry growth.
- Continue expanding airlift through strategic partnerships with existing carriers while pursuing new domestic and international air service opportunities.
- Work collaboratively with cruise industry partners to increase cruise visitation and enhance the guest experience throughout the Territory.
- Promote year-round visitation through targeted marketing campaigns that drive travel during shoulder and off-peak seasons.
- Expand destination marketing efforts through integrated advertising, digital marketing, public relations, sports marketing, and strategic partnerships.
- Continue advancing the Destination Optimization Program and the Department's "Vested Interest" initiative to strengthen community engagement, support local businesses, and enhance the visitor experience.
- Support the continued development of marine tourism, cultural tourism, culinary experiences, sports tourism, and festivals as key drivers of visitation and economic impact.
- Invest in customer service training, workforce development, and professional education to strengthen the Territory's hospitality industry.
- Create greater opportunities for Virgin Islanders by fostering sustainable tourism growth that generates jobs, supports entrepreneurship, strengthens local businesses, and contributes to the overall economic prosperity of the Territory.

Through these efforts, the Department will continue working to ensure that tourism remains a powerful economic engine for the U.S. Virgin Islands while preserving the culture, natural resources, and authentic experiences that make our destination unlike any other in the Caribbean.

Visitor Arrivals

- Expand visitor arrival program to include more consistent presence of cultural entertainment at ports of entry.

Accommodations

- Partner with the Economic Development Authority to promote hotel investment opportunities in the territory at key industry trade shows
- Refresh guest incentive programs including the St Croix Vibe promotion to augment marketing efforts to drive increased occupancy

Airline

- Attend major industry airline route development conferences such as Routes Americas, Routes World and CAPA.

- Secure a speaking engagement at a major airline dedicated conference, showcasing the DOT's leadership, commitment and vision in the airline space as a premier tourism destination.
- Secure meetings with up to 20 targeted airlines, presenting the business cases for flying to the USVI.
- Create marketing co-operatives with airlines for route promotion and further route development.
- Implement a gate activation and other marketing and PR initiatives to promote any new upcoming route launches.
- Increase data backed marketing in key markets to support airlift and drive visitation.

Marine

- Continue local marine events support including boat shows and races
- Attend at least one major international industry event
- Develop a detailed marine and boating marketing campaign

Cruise

- Attend leading industry trade shows including Seatrade Cruise Global and FCCA Conference
- Continue to connect with industry stakeholders to market St. Croix as an attractive cruise destination.

Festivals

- KPI based results:
 - Increased air arrivals during the period of Carnivals YOY
 - Develop an attendee satisfaction score via a survey
 - Increase in vendors YOY
 - Increase in village live stream viewership YOY
- Additional Initiatives:
 - Pursue and procure culture-based grants to assist in enhancing cultural education and impact
 - Execute a volunteer drive to recruit 4–6 top volunteers per island

Sales & MICE

- ***Expand the Travel Advisor and MICE Database***

Currently, the CRM includes more than 25,000 travel advisors and over 2,400 meeting planners. The Division is seeking to increase the number of qualified travel advisors and meeting planners in the CRM by at least 25 percent through trade show lead collection, destination training, virtual events, FAM trips, and partnerships with wholesalers, consortia, and industry organizations.

- ***Strengthen Travel Advisor Education***

Continue expanding destination training, webinars, Travel Specialist initiatives, and in-person education to ensure travel professionals have the knowledge and tools necessary to sell the U.S. Virgin Islands effectively.

- ***Expand the Travel Rewards Program***

Currently, more than 4,500 travel advisors are enrolled in the Travel Rewards Program. The Division plans to increase enrollment and engagement by targeting non-enrolled advisors, re-engaging inactive participants, and promoting the program through trade shows, webinars, and other industry events.

- ***Grow the MICE Market***

Strengthen the Territory's position as a premier Caribbean meetings destination by leveraging its competitive advantages—including no passport requirement for U.S. travelers, direct airlift, year-round warm weather, diverse accommodations, distinct cultural experiences, and a variety of meeting and event venues. These assets will be used to attract and convert corporate meetings, incentive programs, associations and conferences, government meetings, and executive retreats, driving increased group business across St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix.

- ***Strengthen Destination Partnerships***

Continue developing collaborative relationships with hotels, DMCs, transportation companies, excursion operators, restaurants, cultural organizations, and other tourism stakeholders to create a unified and competitive MICE product.

- ***Increase International Market Engagement***

Continue strengthening relationships across the mainland United States, Canada, Europe, and other priority international markets through targeted trade shows and co-branded marketing initiatives.

Through these initiatives, the Offshore Sales and MICE Division will continue positioning the U.S. Virgin Islands as a competitive and desirable destination for leisure travel, meetings, conferences, incentive programs, and group business. By strengthening industry relationships, expanding the advisor and planner database, increasing destination education, and improving lead conversion, the Division remains committed to supporting sustainable tourism growth, diversifying visitor markets, and ensuring the U.S. Virgin Islands remains competitive, relevant, and top-of-mind in the global travel marketplace.

International Marketing

- Continue working with airline partners to establish a direct or one-stop feeder route from a key European gateway city
- Strengthen connectivity with travel agents in Denmark and Italy
- Re-evaluate Canadian media plan to engage visitors despite the continued hesitations to travel to America
- Continue to target international travelers from Canada through a dedicated paid media strategy. Ensure messaging reflects welcoming and safety-focused content.

Marketing and Branding

- **Sustain High-Value Tourism Growth:** The Department will target 2–4% growth in stayover arrivals while prioritizing higher-spending visitors. Efforts will focus on increasing average daily rates (ADR) by 5–8% and maintaining hotel occupancy above 70%, ensuring tourism growth translates into stronger economic returns.
- **Increase Marketing ROI and Economic Impact:** The Department will enhance accountability by targeting 10–15% growth in marketing-attributed hotel revenue and improving conversion rates across campaigns. Continued use of advanced attribution tools will ensure marketing investments are directly tied to measurable economic outcomes.
- **Strengthen Digital Performance and First-Party Data:** Digital strategy will focus on efficiency and audience ownership, including:
 - Increasing organic website traffic to 40%+
 - Growing first-party audience databases by 25%
 - Improving conversion rates by 20%
 - Reducing acquisition costs through optimized targeting
- **Expand Reach in Key Audience Segments:** Targeted campaigns will engage high-value and growth segments, including luxury travelers, millennials, Black and African American travelers, LGBTQ+ travelers, and the Caribbean diaspora. These efforts will be supported by culturally relevant partnerships and content-driven storytelling.
- **Accelerate Growth on St. Croix:** The Department will prioritize St. Croix through dedicated campaigns and support for new air service, with a goal of 5–8% visitor growth and increased share of Territory-wide arrivals.
- **Enhance Experiential and Cultural Marketing:** The Department will expand immersive brand activations in key U.S. markets, leveraging music, sports, culinary, and cultural partnerships to bring the Territory’s “Naturally in Rhythm” brand to life and increase earned media value.
- **Improve Year-Round Demand:** Targeted promotions and partnerships will aim to increase off-season travel by 10%, helping stabilize the tourism economy and support local businesses throughout the year.
- **Promote Sustainable Tourism:** Sustainability and cultural preservation will be integrated across all campaigns, reinforcing the Territory’s commitment to responsible tourism and long-term destination stewardship.
- **Maintain Brand Leadership and Recognition:** The Department will continue to pursue national and international recognition through awards, media placements, and global travel rankings to strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands’ position as a premier Caribbean destination.

Public Relations & Influencer

- Expand high-impact earned media coverage that reinforces the U.S. Virgin Islands as a premier Caribbean destination across travel, lifestyle, business, culinary, and cultural media.
- Continue elevating St. Croix through the **"A Vibe Like No Other"** brand platform while showcasing the unique identities and experiences of St. Thomas and St. John.
- Drive year-round visitation by promoting the territory's diverse seasonal experiences, marquee events, and year-round appeal.
- Amplify storytelling around the U.S. Virgin Islands' culture, heritage, culinary scene, festivals, and local communities through authentic, experience-driven narratives.
- Expand outreach to priority audiences, including marine and luxury travelers, Black travelers, U.S. Hispanic travelers, Gen X and Millennial travelers, meetings and incentives, sports tourism, wellness travelers, and multigenerational families.
- Increase visibility for Virgin Islands-owned businesses, entrepreneurs, chefs, artisans, and cultural ambassadors through strategic media placements and storytelling initiatives.
- Continue to strengthen the communications strategy for the Division of Festivals by leveraging earned media, influencer partnerships, and celebrity engagement to elevate the territory's signature celebrations.
- Deepen relationships with a diverse portfolio of influencers, creators, celebrities, and Virgin Islands descendants to deliver authentic storytelling and broaden the destination's reach across emerging and established platforms.
- Expand niche-focused media and influencer familiarization experiences that showcase the territory's diverse tourism offerings, including wellness, culinary, cultural heritage, adventure, sustainability, sports, and luxury travel.
- Leverage destination milestones, strategic partnerships, and third-party recognitions to generate newsworthy storytelling opportunities that reinforce the U.S. Virgin Islands' leadership within the Caribbean tourism market.

Social Media

- *Expand on-island content capture to build a stronger library of authentic, social media-first assets.*
- *Use social listening and traveler insights to create FAQs, itineraries, and planning content that helps move travelers toward booking.*
- *Grow LinkedIn thought leadership through the Commissioner's and Department's channels to elevate the U.S. Virgin Islands as a leading Caribbean destination and tourism authority.*
- *Increase qualified reach and engagement through platform-specific content tailored to traveler intent.*
- *Expand short-form video, creator partnerships, and user-generated content to drive discovery and authentic destination storytelling.*

Community Communications

- Expand documentary-style storytelling surrounding Virgin Islands festivals and cultural traditions.
- Produce additional cross-island content showcasing the unique identities of St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.
- Increase community-focused storytelling to strengthen resident engagement and reinforce the connection between tourism and local communities.
- Leverage Virgin Islands athletes, artists, entertainers, chefs, and cultural ambassadors in destination marketing campaigns.
- Invest in upgraded photography, videography, audio, and content creation equipment to improve production quality and efficiency.
- Develop a comprehensive content planning strategy that strengthens coordination, consistency, and long-term storytelling across all Department communication platforms.

Sports & Lifestyle

- Expand sports marketing campaigns through strategic activations in key feeder markets, aligning the Territory with premier professional and collegiate sports brands.
- Restructure the Sports Tourism Ambassador Program to leverage athletes with ties to the Territory and create impactful cross-marketing opportunities.
- Promote and support in-Territory sporting events across basketball, tennis, golf, pickleball, and boat racing to strengthen the USVI's position as a leading sports tourism destination.

Visitor Experience

- Expand the Tourism Speaks program throughout Virgin Islands schools and establish a Hospitality Career Fair for graduating seniors.
- Increase cultural programming by featuring Quelbe musicians, Quadrille dancers, and other traditional Virgin Islands performers.
- Continue destination education and island familiarization tours to enhance Tourism Ambassador knowledge and visitor engagement.
- Develop visitor assistance resources, including Tourism Comfort Blankets and Overnight Care Packets, to support guests requiring emergency assistance.
- Enhance visitor engagement tools and operational communication resources, including digital displays featuring visitor statistics, arrivals, and departmental updates.
- Expand frontline staffing and workforce development initiatives to strengthen visitor services.
- Improve customer service resources and support tools to enhance the overall visitor experience.
- Address airport staff parking limitations to improve operational efficiency and employee support.
- Establish a dedicated employee breakroom to support frontline staff wellness and workplace needs.
- Expand outreach efforts to strengthen connectivity with the accessible travel community and enhance awareness of the U.S. Virgin Islands as an inclusive destination.

Film Office

- Continue pursuing high-value, fast-turnaround productions that generate immediate economic impact, including network unscripted and reality television, self-financed independent films, commercial productions and fashion campaigns.
- Strengthen the U.S. Virgin Islands' presence within the film and television industry by actively participating in leading trade organizations and industry events, including the Location Managers Guild International, Association of Film Commissioners International, Producers Guild of America, American Black Film Festival and the American Film Market.
- Continue collaborating with the Virgin Islands Economic Development Authority to evaluate and recommend enhancements to the USVI STARS Incentive Program that improve accessibility while increasing the Territory's competitiveness for a broader range of productions.
- Partner with industry stakeholders to expand the Territory's production capacity by supporting workforce development for local production crews, strengthening key technical disciplines and advocating for continued investment in on-island production infrastructure, equipment and support services.
- Redesign and modernize the official Film Office website with refreshed content, enhanced production resources and an expanded library of high-quality location photography that better showcases the diverse filming opportunities available throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Appendix

- FY Analysis
- FY Expenditures
- FY27 Recommended Expenditures

LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS		
POST AUDIT DIVISION		
EXPENDITURES BY PRIME ACCOUNTS		
STATEMENT 2		
DEPARTMENT/AGENCY/OFFICE NAME: TOURISM (920)		
Fiscal Period		PROJECTED 2027

PERSONNEL SERVICES		
CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE SALARIES		241,819
UNCLASSIFIED EMPL. SALARIES		2,314,000.00
TEMP/PART TIME SALARIES		
OVERTIME SALARIES		
LUMP SUM PAYMENTS		
NIGHT DIFFERENTIAL COMP		
OTHER DIFFERENTIAL COMP		
FEES & COMPENSATION NOC		100,000.00
HOLIDAY PAY		
ALL OTHER		
SUB-TOTAL		2,655,819
CAPITAL OUTLAYS		
MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT		
VEHICLES		-
ALL OTHER		
SUB-TOTAL		-
FRINGE BENEFITS		
EMPLOYER CONTR. RETIREMENT		492,203.00
F.I.C.A.		160,011.00
MEDICARE		38,509.00

HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUM		522,475.00
WORKERS COMP. PREMIUMS		10,512.00
UNIFORM ALLOWANCE		
ALL OTHER		
SUB-TOTAL		1,223,710.00
SUPPLIES		
OFFICE SUPPLIES		30,000.00
OPERATING SUPPLIES		25,000.00
SMALL TOOLS/MINOR EQUIPMENT		84,000.00
ALL OTHER		183,000.00
SUB-TOTAL		322,000.00
OTHER SERVICES & CHARGES		
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES		19,716,190.00
COMMUNICATION		150,000.00
TRAVEL		610,000.00
TRANSPORTATION - NOT TRAVEL		450,000.00
ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION		8,123,198.00
PRINTING AND BINDING		50,000.00
INSURANCE		35,000.00
REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE		600,000.00
RENTAL- LAND/BUILDING		118,504.00
RENTAL - MACHINES/EQUIPMENT		525,000.00
TRAINING		100,000.00

SECURITY		25,000.00
ALL OTHER		4,150,579.00
SUB-TOTAL		34,653,471.00
UTILITY SERVICES		
ELECTRICITY		110,000.00
WATER		35,000.00
SUB-TOTAL		145,000.00
TOTAL EXPENSES		39,000,000

- FY 27 Personnel Budget
- Department Personnel
- TARF Appropriations
- Sponsorships

YEAR	VDR NAME/ITEM DESC	AMOUNT	COMMENTS
2026	A TASTE OF ST.CROIX, INC	150,000.00	Sponsorships
2026	QUANTAM TECHNOLOGY	3,500.00	SPONSORSHIP
2026	STRICTLY THE BEST	3,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-STANLEY SERENADE
2026	WE GROW FOOD	10,000.00	SPONSORSHIP - BORDEAUX AG FAIR
2026	ROCK CITY ENTERTAINMENT	3,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-DOMINO TOURNAMENT
2026	ANDREW HAIRSTON	3,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-PARACYCLING COMPETITION
2026	ST. JOHN LANDSHARKS	20,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-8 TUFF MILES

2026	CHARMING TWIRLERS	3,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-MAJORETTES COMPETITION
2026	GEMININ PHOTOGRAPHY	1,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-FASHION EXTRAVAGANZA
2026	UNIVERSITY OF THE VI	5,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-AFTERNOON ON THE GREEN
2026	STRICTLY THE BEST	15,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-CALYPSO COMPETITION
2026	ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA SORORITY INC.- MU GAMMA OMEGA	7,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-GALA
2026	PATE FESTIVAL	2,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-PATE COMPETITION-ST. CROIX
2026	ALEXANDRA SWAYNE GOLF LTD	30,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-GOLF INITIAITVE
2026	CARIBBEAN POSH WEEKEND	8,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
2026	BASKETBALL TRAVELERS, INC	280,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-PARADISE JAMS-BASKETBALL
2026	MILLIN-YOUNG	7,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
2026	COMMITTEE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF CARENAGE	10,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-FRENCHTOWN CELEBRATION
2026	COMMUNITY IMPACT FOUNDATION	2,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-BUSINESS SUMMIT
2026	COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF VIRGIN ISLANDS, INC.	9,800.00	SPONSORSHIP-LIBRARY FEST
2026	ST. THOMAS YACHT CLUB	50,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-CLIPPER RACE INITIATIVE
2026	UCE PRODUCTIONS	3,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-FILM INITIATIVE

2026	UVI RESEARCH & TECHNOLOGY PARK	2,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-SUMMIT
2026	KARL HALE	50,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-TENNIS TOURNAMENT-ST. CROIX
2026	FLORIDA CARIBBEAN CRUISE ASSOCIATION	25,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-SEATRADE EVENTS
2026	KING OF THE WING	50,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-WING COMPETITION
2026	GENTLEMEN OF JONES	5,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-GALA EVENT
2026	AGRICULTURE & FOOD FAIR	25,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-AG FAIR-STX
2025	KING OF THE WING	50,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-WING COMPETITION/EVENT
2026	MYRON G. DANIELSON AMERICAN LEGION POST	2,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-CONFERENCE
2026	CARIBBEAN DRAG RACING COMPETITION	29,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-DRAG RACING EVENT - STX
2026	YOUNG ENTREPRENEURZ ORGANIZATION	154,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT
2026	ST. CROIX CHRISTMAS BOAT PARADE	9,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-STX BOAT PARADE
2026	LA REINE CHICKEN SHACK	6,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-CULINARY EVENT
2026	COCO B. PRODUCTIONS	23,624.75	SPONSORSHIP-DIASPORA DC EVENT
2026	ESS PROMOTIONS	5,000.00	SPONSORSHIP CONCERT EVENT
2026	USVI HOTEL & TOURISM ASSN.	10,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-CONFERENCE
2026	BASKETBALL ASSOCIATION	9,500.00	SPONSORSHIP-BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT-HENNEMAN
2026	FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL/TEN SLEEPLESS KNIGHTS	10,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-FOLKLIFE FESTIVAL

2026	CHRISTIANSTED COMMUNITY ALLIANCE, INC	20,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-CHRISTIANSTED COMMUNITY ALLIANCE
2026	TASTE OF THE CARIBBEAN COMPETITION	10,000.00	SPONSORSHIP-TASTE OF THE CARIBBEAN
TOTAL		1,123,924.75	

- Tourism Imprest & Escrow Accounts
- Vehicle Listing