

Total visitors arrivals grew by 6.2 percent in December 2019

Both categories of visitor arrivals grew in December 2019; a total of 276,525 visitors came this month, up 6.2 percent from December 2018. There were 276,525 cruise ship passenger arrivals this month compared to 260,306 last year, a growth of 4.9 percent. The number of cruise ship calls grew to 83 from 79 December last year. Air arrivals, which totaled 68,723 in December, posted a healthy increase of 10.2 percent when compared to 62,126 in December 2018.

Arrivals by District

Air arrivals to the St. Thomas and St. John district rose by 16.5 percent or 7,346 more air passengers than the corresponding month a year ago. On the other hand, St. Croix air arrivals fell by 4.3 percent to 16,857 from 17,601 last December. The St. Thomas and St. John district welcomed 200,146 cruise ship passengers, a gain of 7.2 percent from 186,658 last year. There were 9,309 cruise passengers to St. Croix this month compared to 16,745 cruise passengers last December, a loss of 44.4 percent.

Hotel Occupancy

The Territory's reported hotel occupancy rate for December averaged 53.1 percent compared to 47.2 percent in December last year. The hotel occupancy rate for St. Croix was 54.2 percent at the same level as in December 2018. The occupancy rate for the St. Thomas and St. John district was 52.4 percent compared to 43.4 percent last December. The average length of stay on St. Thomas and St. John was 5.0 nights and 5.3 nights for St. Croix. As a result, the total collected was \$955,759 this December compared to \$1,265,558 in December 2018, a loss of 24.5 percent in hotel room revenues.

Overview Tourism Annual 2019

A total of 2,074,009 visitors' that came to Territory's shores in 2019, or a 8.4 percent increase over last year's arrivals of 1,912,800. The rebound in the annual air visitor arrivals that began in 2018 continued into 2019 and fuelled the increase of total visitors. In fact, air arrivals reached 640,887. The cruise ship arrivals were at the same level as year earlier from 1,430,702 in 2018 to 1,433,122 this year. There were a total of 529 cruise ship calls, about 10.0 percent more calls than a year earlier.

Major carrier direct seats experienced overall Territorial growth in 2020, with the additional flights. Moreover, JetBlue added both Territorial districts to their regular travel destinations itinerary. Major carrier seats direct annual seats were averaged 12,903 compared to 9,926 direct seats in calendar year 2018, an increase of 30.0 percent. Major carrier direct seats are based on daily scheduled flights from main carriers or charter flights that operate outside the Caribbean. The

current major carriers to the Territory are American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, Spirit, and United Airlines. Charter flights from Norwegian and Sun Country Airlines have opted to suspend service for the 2019-2020 winter season.

Quarterly Comparison

For the first quarter of 2019, total visitor arrivals were 677,730 from 514,551 in 2018, a 31.7 percent gain. The second quarter of 2019 brought 439,076 visitors, a healthy increase of 10.8 percent or 42,723 additional visitors over 2018. The third quarter recorded 350,632 visitors versus 373,787 visitors for the corresponding period in 2018. The final quarter in 2019 registered 606,570 visitors compared to 637,109 visitors who came to the Territory in 2018, a loss of 4.8 percent.

Arrivals by Air and Cruise

Air arrivals to the Territory in the first quarter grew by a strong 90.4 percent to 193,454 from 101,605 in the first quarter 2019. Second quarter arrivals rose by 28.5 percent from 125,669 to 161,519. Third and fourth quarter air arrivals also increases by 16.1 percent and 2.1 percent.

For the first three months of 2019, cruise passenger arrivals grew by a robust 17.5 percent from 412,946 in 2018 to 484,276 in 2019. Calendar year 2019 second quarter cruise arrivals posted a modest gain of 2.5 percent from 270,684 to 277,557. Third and fourth quarter cruise arrivals were 212,867 and 458,422, respectively, a percentage loss of 16.6 percent for third quarter and 6.8 percent fourth quarter.

Hotel Occupancy

The Territory's hotel annual occupancy rate was 50.9 percent in 2019 virtually the same level as in 2018 occupancy rate of 51.4 percent. . St. Thomas and St. John accommodation establishments placed the annual occupancy rate at 50.4 percent 2.8 percentage points higher than the 47.6 percent in 2018. St. Croix occupancy rate was 51.5 percent compared to 57.6 percent in 2018.

Annual total room nights occupied for 2019 were 460,490, a 25.4 percent increase from the 367,205 occupied room nights in 2018. Available room nights in 2018 were 905,561 up 26.8 percent from the reported 714,184 in 2018. Guest stays overall lowered to 4.5 nights from 5.2 nights in 2018.

Hotel Room Revenues

The Tourism Revolving fund is financed by a hotel occupant tax of 12.5 percent levied on all accommodation establishments that engage in short-term rentals. There were 2,526 universal visitor accommodation units in 2019. Hotel room revenues collected in calendar 2019 were \$21,469,619, up 30.0 percent from last

year's collections of \$16,516,557 posted in 2018. The hotel room revenues fund promotional and marketing activities used to attract visitors to the Territory. The fund has also been used to subsidize the Carnival Virgin Islands, the Crucian Christmas Festival, and the St. John 4th of July Festival.

Guest Registrations

Accommodation establishments reported 277,163 guests stayed in Territory--a 25.9 percent decreased over the 220,102 guests who stayed during the same twelve-month period in 2018. The loss of hotel guests is partly due to decline of U.S. mainland air visitor arrivals within for the St. Thomas and St. John district. Despite fewer hotel guests staying in visitor accommodations in 2011, the average length of stay increased from 4.3 nights to 5.8 nights for St. Thomas and St. John district. On the other hand, the length of stay reduced to 4.3 nights from 4.5 nights for the island of St. Croix.

Of the 277,163 guest who stayed in the Territory during 2019, approximately 72.1 percent were from the U.S. mainland. U.S.V.I. residents accounted for another 13.2 percent of guest, followed by residents of neighboring Puerto Rico, 8.1 percent.

The Miami sales region accounts for 35.7 percent of the 79,347 US mainland hotel guests in 2018, followed by New York sales region by 20.7 percent, Washington D.C. sales region by 12.9 percent, Chicago sales region by 10.3 percent, and lastly, Los Angeles sales region by 10.3 percent. Leading states where guests originate from are Texas, New York, New Jersey, and Florida. Together these six states produced over one-third of all Virgin Islands guests.

British Virgin Islands was the leading country originator of foreign visitors to the Territory, with 5,738 guests staying in visitor establishments in 2019. Denmark the previous leading country of foreign nationals registered 4,876 guests. The large decrease is partly due to the suspension of direct chartered Danish flights to the district of St. Croix that began in October 2011. Other leading countries, in rank order, include Canada, Italy, and the United Kingdom.