GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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Statement By Premier and Minister of Finance Honourable Natalio D. Wheatley on the 2026 Tourism Industry Performance

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Madam Speaker:

I rise to update this Honourable House and the people of the Virgin Islands on our tourism industry's performance in 2026.

The latest provisional visitor-arrival statistics show that, from **January through September 2026**, the Virgin Islands welcomed **1,071,716 visitors**, up from **835,225** visitors during the same period in 2025.

Madam Speaker, this is the earliest the Virgin Islands has reached one million visitors in its history. It represents an increase of approximately **28.3 percent**, or **236,491 additional visitors**, over the first nine months of 2025.

Madam Speaker, this is an encouraging sign of the Virgin Islands' continued strength as a tourism destination.

The figures show especially strong performance in cruise tourism. From January through September 2026, the Territory recorded **797,784 cruise passengers**, compared with **578,315** during the same period in 2025.

This was an increase of approximately **38.0 percent**, or **219,469 additional cruise passengers**. The growth has benefited taxi drivers, tour operators, bars, restaurants, craft markets, and other sector vendors. New cruise-related businesses are emerging, and new safari vehicles are being built as we speak.

Overnight tourism also grew. Arrivals rose from **238,202 visitors** in January through September 2025 to **256,943 visitors** during the same period in 2026.

This was an increase of approximately **7.9 percent**, or **18,741 additional overnight visitors**.

Madam Speaker, growth in overnight visitation is significant because these visitors engage more broadly with the tourism economy, including accommodations, restaurants, transportation providers, charter and marine businesses, attractions, cultural experiences, and other locally owned enterprises.

Day-trip arrivals were the only segment to decline, falling from **18,708** in January through September 2025 to **16,989** in the same period of 2026—a decrease of approximately **9.2 percent**, or **1,719 visitors**.

A closer look shows growth in each of the first three quarters, with especially strong gains in August and September.

In the **first quarter of 2026, January through March**, total arrivals reached **612,263**, compared with **494,065** in the first quarter of 2025—growth of approximately **23.9 percent**.

First-quarter cruise arrivals rose by **29.3 percent**, while overnight arrivals increased by approximately **6.2 percent**.

In the **second quarter, April through June**, the Territory welcomed **254,304 visitors**, up from **211,362 visitors** in the same quarter of 2025—an increase of approximately **20.3 percent**.

Second-quarter cruise arrivals again rose by approximately **29.3 percent**, while overnight visitation outpaced first-quarter growth, increasing by approximately **10 percent** over 2025.

The **third quarter, July through September**, was stronger still, the strongest third quarter in the history of the Virgin Islands. The Territory welcomed **205,149 visitors**, compared with **129,798** in the same quarter of 2025—an increase of **75,351 visitors**, or approximately **58.1 percent**. Cruise arrivals rose by **95.1 percent**, from **75,910** to **148,115**, while overnight arrivals increased by **7.9 percent**, from **47,013** to **50,734**. Day-trip arrivals fell by **8.4 percent**, from **6,875** to **6,300**.

The monthly data clarify this result. July recorded **86,358 arrivals**, compared with **83,366** in July 2025—an increase of approximately **3.6 percent**. August arrivals reached **58,700**, up from **25,973** a year earlier, an increase of approximately **126.0 percent**. Provisional September estimates show **60,091 arrivals**, compared with **20,459** in September 2025—an increase of **39,632 visitors**, or approximately **193.7 percent**.

Madam Speaker, September's surge was driven mainly by cruise arrivals, which increased from **13,344** in September 2025 to **53,623** in September 2026—approximately **301.9 percent**. Overnight arrivals rose from **4,860** to **5,044** , or approximately **3.8 percent**, while day-trip arrivals fell from **2,255** to **1,424**, a decline of approximately **36.9 percent**. These figures show the differing trends across our main visitor segments.

Madam Speaker, these figures confirm that demand for the Virgin Islands remains strong.

Cruise arrivals accounted for approximately **92.8 percent of the net increase** in total visitor arrivals during the first nine months of 2026. While this growth is encouraging, we must address the more modest rise in overnight arrivals and the decline in day trips, while expanding each segment's contribution to the wider tourism economy.

However, our goal must extend beyond counting arrivals.

We must ensure that increased visitation delivers **economic participation and opportunity for Virgin Islanders, stronger tourism businesses, higher visitor spending, better visitor experiences, and sustainable benefits across all our islands**.

This is especially important as the Government implements the **National Tourism Policy 2026–2036** and develops the accompanying National Tourism Strategy.

Accordingly, the Government is focused not only on increasing visitor numbers, but also on improving the quality, competitiveness, and sustainability of the Virgin Islands tourism product.

We will continue prioritising marine and yachting, culture and heritage, culinary tourism, community-based experiences, events, product development and enhancement, destination management, and the visitor experience from arrival.

We must also expand overnight visitation and encourage greater visitor spending throughout the Territory, including on Virgin Gorda, Anegada, Jost Van Dyke, and our other islands and communities.

Madam Speaker, the first nine months of 2026 give us reason for optimism.

Overall visitor arrivals rose by **28.3 percent**, cruise arrivals by **38.0 percent**, and overnight visitation by **7.9 percent**, demonstrating the strength of the Virgin Islands tourism brand and the resilience of an industry central to our economy.

At the same time, tourism success must be measured not only by arrivals, but by how well it improves livelihoods, creates opportunities for our people, supports local businesses, and protects the natural and cultural assets that make the Virgin Islands unique.

The Government will therefore continue working through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sustainable Development, alongside the BVI Tourist Board, industry stakeholders, and the wider community, to manage this growth strategically and sustainably for the benefit of the people of the Virgin Islands.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Additional Documents or Media

- hoa_tourism_performance_2026.pdf