



**Remarks by Chief Minister and Minister for Tourism
Honourable Dr. D. Orlando Smith, OBE
Launch of New BVI Branding
New York Yacht Club
Tuesday, 8 November 2005**

Adjusting Our Sails to Capture the Prevailing Winds

Ladies and Gentlemen: for over 3 decades, visitors from around the world have come to the British Virgin Islands.

They have come to enjoy our warm sunshine, our clear, blue waters, our pristine beaches, our refreshing breezes. And over the years a strong and enduring relationship has been established between the people of the BVI and the community of travelers who have discovered our uniquely beautiful and captivating corner of the world.

Every tourist destination has its share of visitors who return year after year. But I think I can say without fear of contradiction that the BVI stands virtually unmatched in terms of the number of visitors who not only keep coming back – but who have grown to feel that our welcoming islands are not just a tourist destination – but indeed a second home.

This intimate bond that has been forged between us and our visitors is something we treasure. And it is something that we know we must never take for granted.

We are deeply committed to meeting and exceeding the expectations of all those who choose to come to our islands – whether they are returning to the same villa on Jost Van Dyke they have been staying at for the past twenty years – or if they are paying their very first visit to Little Dix Bay. And that commitment is not a luxury – in today's every more competitive marketplace it is an absolute necessity.

Ladies and Gentlemen: it is no great revelation to say that the international tourism market is in a state of rapid change. Consumer tastes around the world are evolving; new consumer bases, particularly in Asia and Eastern Europe are opening up as newly established middle classes are seeking vacation opportunities abroad;

security threats are, unfortunately, becoming an increasingly central factor in making travel plans; and tourism destinations around the world are learning to be increasingly sophisticated in meeting the needs of their customers.

So the challenge for the BVI is clear: we must stay ahead of the curve in the rapidly changing tourism landscape – while at the same time retaining that core value proposition that says: coming to the BVI isn't just about getting a tan – it's about being let in on a wonderful little secret. Meeting that goal is a top priority for the BVI – and it has informed our tourism strategy every step of the way.

We recognize that in order to meet evolving tastes we needed to encourage new development. That is why we have partnered with the U.S. based Mainsail Development Group. Just this past month we were tremendously pleased to announce groundbreaking on a new \$65 million luxury boutique resort.

This resort – to be located on Scrub Island whose name belies its great beauty – will rival the finest destination resorts in the region and represents the most significant new development project the BVI has seen in over 20 years.

We are also currently in talks to launch major developments on other islands throughout the Territory, including Beef Island and Norman Island. And as we encourage these developments we remain steadfastly committed to ensuring that the development is done in a manner that is consistent with the expectations our visitors have of their BVI experience.

So let me say clearly: there will be no high-rise condominiums in the BVI. There will be no mass-market hotels. As we encourage new development in order to offer a wider array of choices for our visitors – we affirm our promise that the BVI will forever remain a place where our natural treasures are protected, our serene life-style is preserved and our commitment to tranquility is never compromised.

In addition to the new development projects underway, we are also focusing on improving all other aspects of our product. On the service front, we have recently launched the Tourism Industry Service Standards programme. This innovative cross-sector initiative has provided training and best-practice development for virtually every employee who will be in contact with a visitor – from the Immigration Desk at the airport to the check-in desk at the hotel.

The people of the BVI have always been proud of our welcoming spirit. With the Tourism Industry Service Standards programme we are helping to ensure that the professionalism of our service will match the warmth of our hospitality. And as we look to the future, we are also making a major investment in preparing the next generation of leaders in the industry.

Recently, my Government purchased a small hotel property in Road Town, which is being converted into a world-class hospitality training centre. From this centre the hotel managers, head chefs, and Tourism Board directors of tomorrow will learn their crafts at the highest levels.

Taken together, these policies and programmes are already advancing our vision of a tourism industry that has the innovation and agility to meet the changing needs and tastes of visitors, while retaining the core characteristics that make us unique and special.

And it is in that spirit that I am so pleased and proud to be here with you today to launch our new marketing effort.

This campaign captures with simplicity and elegance the core idea of what tourism in the BVI is all about. It is about seclusion. It is about beauty. It is about bonding with your loved ones in a place that feels like a home away from home.

And, as ever, it is about being in on a secret – being one of the fortunate few who by design or by happenstance has discovered a place unlike any other – and who now has the chance to share that secret with the people they care about.

In its fresh look and feel, its modern presentation and its creative execution this campaign is a reflection of the BVI's commitment to navigating the challenging and exciting world of 21st century tourism.

In its message and its imagery it reminds us that even as the BVI evolves the basic values that we hold dear are constant and unwavering.

Ladies and Gentlemen: as I noted at the outset of my remarks, the world truly is changing and the tourism industry is changing with it. For some, this rapid change could be considered daunting or frightening.

We see it as a thrilling new chapter in a story that has only just begun.

Maybe this attitude comes naturally to us. We are, after all, an island people and sailing is part of our DNA. And as every sailor knows, winds change – and the sign of a good seafarer is the ability to adjust to new circumstances.

So it is with great confidence that we now stand ready to embrace the changes that this moment requires. We shall adjust our sails to capture the prevailing winds and we shall move forward.

We are grateful that you have joined us here today. And we are anxious to work with all of you here and with our many friends throughout the world – for what we are certain will be a wonderful ride.

Thank you.