



**Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative  
delegation to St. Lucia  
Caribbean Sustainable Tourism**

Virgin Gorda is proud of three youth leaders who recently traveled to St. Lucia to participate in the 11<sup>th</sup> Caribbean Media Exchange on Sustainable Tourism. Feliza Fenty, Latoya George and Kyle Harrigan represented the Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative to serve as the first CMEx youth delegation from the BVI. Held from Dec. 6-10, this year's conference explored the theme of Caribbean Tourism: Another Level of Innovation. These young people learned from prominent leaders in the tourist industry, senior government officials and high-level media reporters from the Caribbean and the U.S. and Caribbean about innovative ways to manage the delicate balance of increasing tourism while maintaining the unique Caribbean culture and preserving the environment.

Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace, Secretary General, Caribbean Tourism Organization gave examples of innovation from islands like Hawaii's support for indigenous artisans and St. John for its recycling program. Other presenters acknowledged Antigua's Curtain Bluff Resort for investing in training local youth and African heritage tours in St. Kitts, Nevis, Barbados, Bermuda and the Bahamas. Branding was a hot topic as a way of marketing the Caribbean culture. 'Going Green' was a major strategy for dealing with climate change -- being mindful of our fragile ecosystems and how to preserve them. The

Palm Haven Hotel in Antigua was acknowledged for planting native trees to reduce bugs, chemicals and heat. CNN's Operations Manager, Clayton Sizemore gave an eye-opening talk on disaster preparedness.

Conference participants were curious to see how their island measured on the National Geographic Traveler's Destination Scorecard. Reported on by James Dion, the survey assessed 111 islands worldwide on environment, cultural-social impact, aesthetics, heritage, tourism management and general outlook. "Some islands are being loved to death," he explained. The BVI scored 61 -- in moderate trouble category: "blame the cruise ships, poor land-use planning and high density development. To learn more about the survey, visit: [www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/features/islandrated0/11/islands.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/traveler/features/islandrated0/11/islands.html)

When Susan Soltero, Univision's meteorologist described climate change, she asked Latoya George to share her experience of submarine trip in St. Thomas where she saw their dead coral reefs. "There's still hope for Virgin Gorda," she says. "We have to make it happen now. Don't wait for 5 years!"

CMEx delegates enjoyed VIP treatment -- traveling each day to one of the six hotels hosting the CMEx conference's meetings, luncheons and dinners. They also enjoyed a hands-on experience of sustainable tourism-- with a sailing excursion to the island's southern sulfur springs followed by a tour and luncheon at Jade Mountain at Anse Chastanet, a successful hotel that incorporates the beauty of nature with furniture and furnishings from local artisans. At night, they enjoyed the Kalalu Festival with aboriginal African, French-patois singers and Soca superstar Machel Montano from Trinidad.

**VGyli**

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"You can only grow as much as you have the capacity -- the invisible human resource," said St. Lucia's Minister of Tourism Senator Allen Chastanet. A successful hotel owner, he speaks from experience. "Be careful not to marginalize local people -- empower them with training, nurture them as entrepreneurs and with access to capital so we can truly create sustainable tourism."

VGyli has dedicated this year to sustainable tourism. Given the Caribbean islands are on the front line of climate change and global warming, there is

an urgent need for informed, educated and empowered citizens who can serve as environmental stewards and engage people on their islands to address critical issues and develop strategic plans for sustainable development. Who better than youth to be the champions? During the fall, VGYLI youth watched the movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, participated in ocean field trips and tree-planting activities; learned to swim and snorkel to develop a greater appreciation for the island's delicate coral reef systems and one attended the Ocean Conservancy Youth Summit.

An aspiring TV journalist, Feliza Fenty conducted interviews with Dr. Basil Springer, Chairman of Counterpart International Caribbean and others for a video she's producing. "I've known that sustainable tourism is one of the twin pillars of our economy," said Feliza. "Now the doors are opening so I see what I need to do to help preserve the environment too."

BVI youth demonstrated their leadership abilities by participating on the youth panel, Keeping it Real, a Youth Outlook. When asked to imagine how they would build a resort, they replied: "Go green!" Kyle Harrigan suggested, "Build the resort around the environment rather than removing nature's beauty of large boulders and trees." He also suggested giving employees shares in the company so they are invested in its success. "They would do whatever they can to make it succeed."

When asked for their recommendations about future CMEx conferences, Kyle joined an Anguilla youth to present their youth recommendations: top 10 trends affecting tourism; strategies for implementing sustainable tourism and successful case studies on what works; and finally creating a resolution or promise: "What are you going to do when you get back to your island?"

At CMEx, BVI youth leaders fulfilled VGYLI's mission is to inspire and assist young people to develop their full potential, broaden their horizons, strengthen their character and develop their leadership and entrepreneurship abilities so they can address the economic, environmental and social challenges of the 21st century. They were pleasantly surprised that when they took the risk to share their ideas and opinions all these important people were eager to hear what they had to say. Upon their return, they look forward to sharing their experience with

BVI leaders at a reception at the Governor's House in 2008.

On the final night, the CMEx Journalism Awards were presented followed by CMEx talent competition, where Kyle won 3<sup>rd</sup> prize and a weekend at Coco Palms Resort. Fortunately, contestants were able to enjoy a performance -- but not compete with -- international star Rhea!

"The BVI should be very proud of these young people who represented Virgin Gorda and the BVI," said Marianne Larned, Director of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute. This was the Institute's second CMEx conference with youth delegates, the first in San Juan with the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative.

VGYLI thanks its sponsors: Counterpart International, Office of the Governor, Minister of Education & Culture, BVI Tourist Board, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, L&S Rentals, Mahogany Car Rentals, Seven Jewels Manor, Cynthia Thomas, A Dream Come True Villas, Bitter End Yacht Club.

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