



**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 11th 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

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

PO Box 1171, Virgin Gorda, BVI 284.442.5576

"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 3rd 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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www.vgyli.org



left to right: Kenrick Quashie, Gail Moaney, Tania Cruz, Feliza Fenty, Kim Diaz Allen

Virgin Gorda Youth Leader Speaks at Caribbean Conference

Youth leaders from across the Caribbean had a unique experience of speaking directly with leaders of tourism industry, media, alternative energy and development. The Caribbean Media Exchange on Sustainable Tourism (CMEx) held its first youth panel called Keeping It Real at their May 15-19 conference in San Juan, PR. There were 17 youth delegates among the hundred strong participant base from the Caribbean (English, French, Spanish and Dutch), Europe, North, Central and South America. While young people have served as delegates at past conferences, this was their first chance to share their thoughts, concerns, actions and goals for their future with the prestigious leaders and conference participants.

“Caribbean public and private sector leaders were very impressed,” said Dr. Basil Springer, Chairman Counterpart Caribbean. “These youth leaders have a vision for the future of their islands. It’s imperative that the leaders of our islands invest in our young people now so together we can build a more sustainable economy.”

“In the year 2020 we will be the leaders of our island,” said Tania Cruz, “What do we want for our lives and for the future of our island?” Ms. Cruz presented the Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative’s 2020 Report on Sustainable Tourism that outlines a five-point strategy and a comprehensive plan. It is the culmination of a four-year demonstration project with the Stone Soup Leadership Institute.

Virgin Gorda youth Feliza Fenty, shared about the Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative (VGYLI) program. An aspiring TV journalist, Feliza is eager to find ways to use the power of the media to promote sustainable tourism. She recently surveyed eighty people in the BVI about their perceptions of their environment. She was concerned that while students in the United Kingdom must watch the environmental documentary, *The Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore, many BVI students had never heard of it. “While the truth is inconvenient, we must each do our part,” she said. “Before you throw that soda can in the road, think twice. We can be a shining example.”

St. Vincent youth delegate Kenrick Quashie expressed a sense of urgency for to get more young people involved in sustainable tourism and development. “We just can’t wait!” he explained. He invited VGYLI youth to participate in a regional conference for youth leaders to “create a Caribbean crusade for sustainable tourism.”

“Sustainable tourism is the keystone industry for the Caribbean: we need to invest in the three key elements of social, economic and environmental,” said Senator Allen Chastanet, St. Lucia's Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation and Chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). “The times are changing. It’s time to stop the debate. It’s time for action. Let’s try to make it work.” Chastanet cited tourism innovations in Mexico who embraced tourism twenty years and have created an economic miracle. The Senator recently returned from Dubai – where they are investing heavily in tourism development. It was noted Dubai is investing \$10 billion for youth development to “inspire knowledge, ideas and innovation among the builders of tomorrow’s world.”

Youth delegates from eight other Caribbean islands also learned from leaders about the complex issues facing the Caribbean tourism industry – from skyrocketing fuel prices and concerns of losing market share to global competition. They also heard about innovative solutions such as brand marketing, renewable energy projects, satellite accounting systems, creating unique Caribbean island experiences, producing indigenous arts and crafts, investing in entrepreneurship training and opportunities, and linkages with the Diaspora. “The Diaspora represents a multi-million dollar opportunity for the Caribbean, and maximizing the financial, intellectual and creative potential of this market took center stage,” said CMEx conference coordinator Bevan Springer under the theme "Embracing the Diaspora, Connecting Communities."

Ms. Fenty was most impressed by Nevis Minister Carlisle Powell’s presentation on the Island’s Geo-Thermal Energy Program. “After years of study to determine that Nevis was in fact an ideal location, we are finally moving forward with this project and will produce power by July 2009,” said the Minister. Given rising fuel costs and their implication on the Caribbean islands, it’s good to know their program will reduce energy costs from 30-50% in a few years. “The best news is that the project isn’t costing the Island anything, thanks to investors from Germany, in-kind support of economist and engineer from OECS, plus technical assistance from UNIDO.”

“What can we do to make tourism more sustainable?” asked St. Lucia youth delegate Sarah Munn, “Just giving people more information isn’t enough to make people care.” Vieques Youth Leadership Initiative delegate Kimberly Diaz Allen responded, “We must walk the talk so that we can be an example as we transfer this knowledge to the younger generation.”

“Given the challenges we are facing in the Caribbean and around the world, it’s time for action,” said Gail Moaney, Executive VP Travel and Economic Development, Ruder Finn and Board member of Counterpart International who served as moderator of the CMEx youth panel. “These youth have a vision and are taking action. They are in inspiration to us all.”

VGyli’s mission is to inspire young people and give them the tools and training to develop their full potential, broaden their horizons, strengthen their character and develop their leadership abilities so they can positively contribute to a better future for their community. Our goal is to develop a comprehensive leadership program that provides educational and training opportunities; collaborates with other VG/BVI organizations; catalyzes community projects; and develops public-private partnerships to prepare Virgin Gorda youth to become leaders of the 21st century. VGyli thanks its May sponsors: Counterpart International, Ministry of Education & Culture, Office of the Governor of the British Virgin Islands, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Virgin Gorda campus, A Dream Come True Villa, Bitter End Yacht Club, Brown Williams, jetBlue, Mineshaft Café and the Stone Soup Leadership Institute.

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