

BLACK MEETINGS & TOURISM

THE AUTHORITY ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN CONVENTIONS, INCENTIVES & LEISURE TRAVEL

African-American Guide To Meetings, Incentives & Traveling In The South

- The Value Of A Diverse Workforce And The Cost Of Not Having One
- Djuan Rivers Continues to Excel at Disney's New Hawaii Resort
- Hyatt Regency Bonaventure Conference Center & Spa Has It All

AREA GUIDES
Kansas City, New Jersey,
Southern California, The Bahamas,
Austin, Denver

COVER STORY

- 33** The South is well-known for its deeply rooted African-American heritage, civil rights history and influential culinary and musical traditions. Think of Birmingham's Civil Rights District, Atlanta's Sweet Auburn neighborhood, Mississippi Delta blues, New Orleans jazz, Memphis barbecue joints and South Carolina Low Country cooking. The **African-American Guide to Meetings, Incentives & Traveling in the South** is your roadmap to visiting the region.

By Sonya Stinson

FEATURES

- 20** Good business is business that allows you to enter it from a variety of angles and emerge with a variety of views. It is the variety of views that will allow today's business leaders to adapt to a rapidly changing demographic. **The Value of a Diverse Workforce and the Cost of Not Having One** explores this subject in detail.

By Michael Bennett

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Martin Luther King Statue
Photo Credit: Jeffrey Greenberg

Property Profile #1

PREMIER ST. THOMAS MEETING & INCENTIVE RESORT TO UNDERGO \$45 MILLION TRANSFORMATION

BY EDITH BILLUPS

Starting October 2011, travelers visiting the iconic Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort will experience the results of a \$45 million makeover that will provide meeting and event planners with a wide range of new offerings and venues.

Long considered one of the finest properties in the US Virgin Islands, the May 1- September 30 renovation will require the full closure of the main tower of Frenchman's Reef and its facilities. The plan will give the 302 guest rooms at the resort's main tower a completely new interior that incorporates a fresh color scheme and modern furnishings. Restoration plans also include an updated and expanded spa and health club, a redesign of the outdoor common areas, including the pool and water features, and a makeover of the "Windows on the Harbor" restaurant.

During a recent visit, I got to check out the ambitious project and take in a host of popular activities that included a half day sail on a gorgeous catamaran that visitors can rent for a trip from St. Thomas to St. John's. I also explored some of the island's most popular restaurants, including Wicked, located on the waterfront at Yacht Haven Grande and rode the Skyride Tram at Paradise Point that offers stunning views of the town of Charlotte Amalie.

I arrived on a Thursday and was greeted by the resort's Director of Sales, Joyce Dore-Griffin, a fixture at the property for the past 16 years. The resort, a popular meeting and incentive destination for US companies due to its no-passport requirements for US citizens and abundance of island activities, has scheduled this second phase of renovation in order to stay ahead of the curve and maintain its position as an island leader, said Dore-Griffin.

The first phase of the St. Thomas resort project was revealed in December 2010 with the completion of the



Sea Cliff wing overlooking the Morning Star Beach Resort, comprised of 80 newly renovated and luxuriously appointed guest rooms.

While the second stage of renovation is underway with the full closure of the main tower of Frenchman's Reef and its facilities, Havana Blue Restaurant, the Sand Bar at Morning Star Beach, Coco Joe's Bar, Star Market Coffee House and the Morning Star Beach and pool areas will remain open for visitors to enjoy.

That night I had the pleasure of dining with the resort's charismatic general manager, Jose Gonzalez, in the resort's stunning Beacon Lounge. The private dining room is located in the resort's impressive wine cellar and is an option for groups, rehearsal dinners or private parties.

According to Gonzalez, "We are tremendously excited to be announcing the final phase of our renovation, which has been the culmination of many years of careful planning to ensure our guests' ultimate satisfaction. We have listened to feedback from many of our most loyal event planners as to how we might improve the resort experience for them and their attendees and have addressed these in order to guarantee continued success for the resort and our customers."

Gonzalez noted that despite the five month shut down, "We are not concerned about business not coming back because we are the biggest hotel on the island and a top destination. However, we want to continue to get our repeat customers back, and we had lost some. I would be concerned if we hadn't made the decision to spend the money."

Gonzales explained that the company "is lucky in that we have the Sea Cliff Wing and the Morning Star, which has rooms all on the beach, so we don't have to shut down completely. Many companies don't have that advantage during a renovation."

The Sea Cliff wing and the boutique Morning Star Beach Resort have a combined 176 rooms with available meeting space between them and will be fully operational and uninterrupted while the renovation takes place at "The Reef" on the cliff above.

The Frenchman's Reef renovation will introduce a

redesign to all guest rooms that will include state of the art technology features, Caribbean elegant décor in shades of sage, cream and blue, rain style shower heads, and Marriott's revive bedding featuring down comforters and thicker mattresses with plush toppers and fluffier pillows.

This phase also includes a renovation of the "Windows on the Harbor" restaurant, which will integrate a lounge bar and provide a central point within the resort to meet for a drink or a meal, while taking in the spectacular view over Charlotte Amalie Harbor.



Finally, the Reef Health Club and Spa is scheduled for a complete renovation and will include a brand new fitness center with a more accessible location and an exclusive spa pool featuring bubble beds, massage jets and plunge areas. The pool and water features at the St. Thomas resort will also undergo a full transformation to create a more satisfying and fully integrated, aquatic experience.

The pool area will have a main, free form infinity-edged pool with features such as Jacuzzis and lounging sun shelf areas; a kids' pool dedicated to the younger guest with interactive water elements; and a grand cascading natural pool. Also featured are improved seating areas, new surfacing, deck lighting and modern fiber-optic lighting displays adding drama to the natural ocean vista.

All 60,000+ sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor event space comprised of 15 unique and flexible venues, including

the Grand Harbor Ballroom, which boasts a sweeping vista over the harbor's blue waters, includes high tech audiovisual capabilities that can complement every event.

Experienced event management specialists will continue to be available to assist in the management of all event details and will administer every request from the initial arrival to the hotel. A dedicated team is in place to assist with all group and meeting needs in order to ensure a successful outcome.

The island of St. Thomas boasts incomparable duty-free shopping, rich culture and history, and exceptional diving and snorkeling opportunities. If visiting, be sure to check out the catamaran, The Cat, whose competent two-person crew of Capt. Joe Morgan and assistant Rebecca Lee, will treat you to an unforgettable afternoon on the Caribbean Sea at some of the most spectacular snorkeling sights. If you're in luck, owner Jim Trilling also will be on board and will delight you with sailing tales and his knowledge of the sea.

A half day sail includes a delicious lunch and stops at Waterlemon Cay and Trunk Bay. The trip also includes a swim with green sea turtles that were in danger of becoming extinct before being placed on the endangered list.

The trip includes a sail past the Annaberg Ruins, a former sugar mill and plantation on St. John's whose slaves in the 1800s could look across the Caribbean Sea to the British Virgin island of Tortola. It would be the slaves of Tortola who would win their freedom first before the slaves on the U.S. Virgins island of St. John's.

It is said that many slaves at the Annaberg plantation, thirsting for freedom, lost their lives when they jumped into the waters and tried to swim across to Tortola.

If you are a history buff, be sure to check out Bluebeard's Castle in St. Thomas, and you also may want to visit St. Thomas when Carnival is in full swing. For more information on group bookings, meeting or event spaces, contact Marriott at (888) 778-4722. You also may visit <http://www.frenchmansreefmarriott.com>.