

**For Immediate Release**

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US Virgin Islands beaches continue to rate among the top in the world

The USVI Hotel & Tourism Association (HTA) along with the VI Conservation Society (VICS) are pleased to announce that, on Monday, December 1st 2015, Six Blue Flags will be raised over awarded beaches and marinas throughout the territory. Each location will be hosting a flag raising ceremony and invite the public to join at 10:00am at any one of the following sites:

**St Croix**

Palms at Pelican Cove (5th year)

Green Cay Marina (4th year)

Green Cay Beach at Tamarind Reef (1<sup>st</sup> year)**St Thomas**

The Ritz Carlton (5th year)

Emerald Beach (5th year)

Crown Bay Marina (4th year)

2015/2016 Blue Flag season launch marks five years of successful implementation of the program in the US Virgin Islands and recognizes the three beaches that have reached this benchmark – Palms at Pelican Cove, The Ritz Carlton (Great Bay) and Emerald Beach (Lindberg Bay). In addition we congratulate a new award recipient – Green Cay Beach at Tamarind Reef Resort. The Blue Flag season in the territory is from December 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup> and requires annual review.

The Blue Flag program is highly regarded as a prestigious eco-label body by the World Tourism Organization. This year over 4000 sites around the world we awarded the Blue Flag certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). The International Blue Flag Jury that reviews each application is composed of representatives from the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), International Lifesaving Federation (ILS), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the European Union for Coastal Conservation (EUCC), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), an Environmental Education expert, the International Council of Marine Industry Associations (ICOMIA) and The Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE).

For our beaches and marinas to receive a Blue Flag status, it means that global standards are being met when it comes to safety, amenities, cleanliness and environmental standards. This can only be good news for our islands that attract a number of tourists every year.

The Blue Flag Program aims at improving the environmental quality of beaches and marinas and the management of coastal areas in a holistic way. It is a system that does not curtail recreation and tourism in the coastal area but rather helps manage it through a wide range of subjects, activities and users that have direct and indirect interactions with the coastal environment.

The Blue Flag Program serves to encourage authorities and managers to provide beaches and marinas with a certain level of environmental quality, cleanliness, and safety standards for local populations and tourists. According Valerie Peters – Blue Flag USVI Coordinator; “We strive to educate recreational coastal users of the delicate ecosystem they are “playing in” and encourage sound practices that will help ensure the health of our marine areas for generations to come. Our beaches a marinas play a very important role when it comes to attracting tourism and job creation – It only makes good business sense to protect them.”

We also encourage new sites to taken on the Blue Flag challenge - For additional information, visit [www.blueflagvi.org](http://www.blueflagvi.org)